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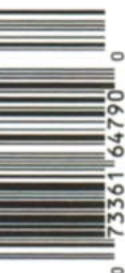
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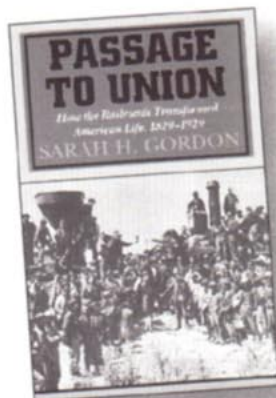
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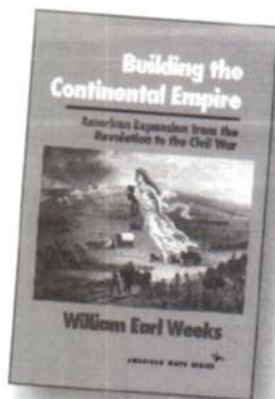
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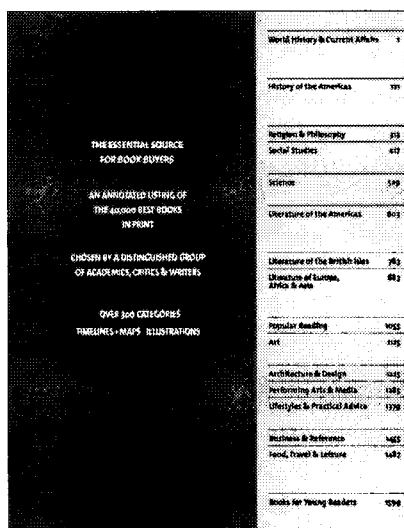
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Editor's Page

Bill Clinton has chosen the phrase “vital center” to characterize his second term. It’s half apt and half deceptive. True, the election was a contest between his “center” and the “right.” While a good many people voted for him out of fear for Social Security and Medicare, he was ill-inclined to remind them that these were “liberal” policies. Neither was he pressured to do so, since liberals and the left were not much to be seen.

But the fact is that the “center” Bill Clinton chases is, after the Reagan era, so much to the “right” of where it once was that old-style liberals are pretty far “left” on the contemporary spectrum. Just consider the expression “vital center.” It was the title of a celebrated book published five decades ago by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Read it and you’ll find that (1) the “center” was then defined as “modern American liberalism,” that creature Mr. Clinton flees as conspicuously as possible; and that (2) the author was convinced that the restoration of “business to political power in this country would have the calamitous results that have generally accompanied business control of the government”—a point likely to be ignored if your treasury secretary is Robert Rubin, your chief of staff is Erskine Bowles, and most of the liberals from your previous administration are seeking employment elsewhere.

So we need to appreciate just where the “vital center” of the 1990s lies. Yes, certainly, it is for the better that Clinton defeated Dole. Only a sectarian could relish the latter in the White House with—or without, for that matter—Republican control of Congress. Still, the agenda of the reelected incumbent (and his vice president) reveals how successful the right, from Reagan to Gingrich, has been. If the welfare reform is any indication of the future, one can only wonder: how many people will be thrown off “the bridge to the twenty-first century”?

Can we pull the center back to, well, the center; and then further left? This may well take “a strong infusion of new fact,” as Todd Gitlin remarks in his thoughtful appraisal of the elections, which opens this issue of *Dissent*. After Gitlin comes Georgia representative John Lewis in conversation with Sean Wilentz. Lewis points out that organized labor was the sole energetic liberal force on the hustings this past fall. The reinvigoration of the AFL-CIO under John Sweeney’s leadership has, indeed, been the most heartening development on the national scene. One encouraging venture, the refashioning of ties between intellectuals and labor, was initiated at a teach-in at Columbia University in October. Two of its principal organizers, Steve Fraser and Josh Freeman, assess its promise in our pages; following them comes philosopher Richard Rorty’s address to its participants together with excerpts from Sweeney’s speech.

Can a “universalizing” political vision be fashioned out of the needs of working Americans? Just what “inclusive” politics entails has been cause for controversy on the left, especially with the rise of identity politics and multiculturalism. Troubling issues are raised by Zelda Bronstein’s account of divisions on the left concerning California’s Proposition 186, which aimed at a single-payer health system. On the other hand, two distinguished political theorists, Anne Phillips and Iris Young, make separate, forceful arguments against misconstruing “the politics of difference.” Coalition politics, Young urges, needs to rest on an intelligent understanding of human distinctions rather than pseudo-universalism.

These sorts of contentions will undoubtedly animate the left as it redefines itself at the end of the millennium. *Dissent* will continue to play its part, initiating in the spring a series reevaluating what it means to be “on the left.”

—M.C. □

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Todd Gitlin

BLOWING OUT THE ELECTION CANDLES

Remarkably few recent presidential campaigns forecast the course of the following four years. Kennedy ran on the “missile gap” and generational vigor, not civil rights or the nuclear test ban. Johnson ran seeking “no wider war,” not seeking to send half a million troops into Vietnam. Nixon ran on law-and-order and vague pacific noises, not the aerial bombardment of Vietnam or environmental reform, affirmative action, wage-and-price controls, or burglary. Jimmy Carter ran on honesty, not deregulation, stagflation, or arousing the wrath of the Ayatollah Khomeini. George Bush ran on the flag and “no new taxes,” not Persian Gulf policy or recession. And in 1992, Bill Clinton split the difference between “putting people first” and “ending welfare as we know it,” but dwelt little on balancing the budget. Arguably, though, Clinton was nearly as consistent as Ronald Reagan, perhaps the only recent president to deliver the main goods he offered—armament, tax cuts, unleashing the market—and even Reagan did not anticipate the Iran-*contra* revelations.

In other words, history invites modesty in predictions. Wild history—in Richard Slotkin’s felicitous phrase—has a way of blowing out election candles. Foreign eruptions are the obvious jokers in the pack. Vietnam, the oil shocks of the seventies, and Iran-*contra* cracked presidential fortunes. But even short of global convulsions, presidential initiatives over the next four years are likely to be severely circumscribed. The debate about whether Bill Clinton is (a) liberal-hearted but self-protective, (b) conservative but duplicitous, or (c) opportunistically ambivalent with his luck about to run out, is beside the point, really, because the results won’t

vary much one way or the other. Either because Bill Clinton inhales the climate around him or because he himself is more instinctively cautious than anything else, it would be foolish to expect strong initiatives from him. Whether or not the Morris strategy of Republicanism Lite can be credited with Clinton’s famous victory—surely the feeble Bob Dole would have been a gift to handlers of any and all proclivities—the coloration of Congress is, to put it mildly, not conducive to substantial advances on a leftish agenda. Only a strong infusion of new fact is going to move American politics off its right-central course. That infusion is not on the horizon.

Congress remains steadfastly Republican, more fiercely, it would appear, than during the first reign of Newt. Turnout was a meager 49 percent, the lowest in any presidential election since 1924. The constituency that might be expected to vote Democratic should the Democrats offer something to the most alienated continues to hold itself out of play. Despite the motor voter law and the rapid registration of former noncitizen immigrants, mainly Hispanics, not enough new voters rushed to the polls to offset the fallers-away from national balloting. In Tennessee, it was even possible to vote during a fifteen-day period ending on Halloween, but the percentage of registered voters who turned out still fell below the 1992 level. Thus did the election continue the trend that has been at work since the beginning of the century—the almost inexorable decline of the voting proportion. There were two, and only two, decades of uptick—the thirties and the sixties. Times of left-wing upheaval, in other words, are times

when the hitherto bitter and withdrawn mobilize for citizenship. Lacking the former, we lack the latter, too.

On the upside, Senator Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) showed that a lefty can win handily even when voting not to kick welfare mothers around. The Senate's only running incumbent to cast a vote against the new welfare bill, he pulled out a nine-point victory, stronger than those of John Kerry (a seven-point victory in Massachusetts) or Tom Harkin (five points in Iowa), both of whom voted to throw disagreeable poor folks on the mercy of state houses. If Minnesota's righteous Scandinavian-based liberalism gave Wellstone an easier time breaking ranks, and arguably a Kerry or Harkin nay might have proved decisive against them, embarrassingly opportunistic yea-voters Joe Biden and Carl Levin have no such excuse, having won their own reelection campaigns by twenty-two- and eighteen-point margins, respectively. Still, if Wellstone was, in the words of his opponent Rudy Boschwitz's campaign ads, "embarrassingly liberal," a certain embarrassment now shifts to the Republicans, who discover there is nothing automatic about their ascendancy. The moral is plain: a first-class candidate in a historically liberal state can sometimes survive on principle.

Alas, as Minnesota goes, so does not go the country. There are demographic basics distinctly injurious to the health of the left, or liberal, or progressive wing. One is the South's continuing prominence in American politics. Since Bob Dole opted out of the Senate in his futile quest for a gesture of nobility, the country's four leading elected officials have all been southerners—President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, Speaker Newt Gingrich, and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. The South is the poorest and least unionized part of the country, its politics still colored—how many more generations, O Lord?—by slavery, Bourbon politics, and their aftermath. Its Democrats are the most Republican and its Republicans the most reactionary. Ever since Kevin Phillips worked up the southern strategy for Richard Nixon in 1968, the Republicans have been following in the footsteps of William Tecumseh Sherman, and the Demo-

crats' only national winners have been centrist southern governors. No wonder Al Gore is panting in the wings.

Another detrimental force in the general climate, by and large, is suburbanization. Although the suburbs are not all gated communities, and not all lily-white, as a bloc the outlying areas persist in exploiting the city for its services, draining away tax revenue, and furthering their advantages. America is allergic to metropolitan government, hence "edge cities" are sucking up resources while tax bases flee huge swaths of urban society. Infrastructure? Never heard of it, as long as the outlying expressways run on time. Still, even on the suburban front, all is not lost. In heavily Republican Orange County, the raving six-term Republican Robert Dornan was narrowly defeated by the newcomer Loretta Sanchez, who benefited from a spurt of Hispanic registration. On Long Island, Carolyn McCarthy wins the Frank Capra Ms.-Smith-Goes-to-Washington Award for defeating the National Rifle Association on her way to Congress. In a usually Republican district, this widowed nurse turned Democrat to protest her opponent's tenderness toward assault weapons, and won handily. There may well be more to be learned from her success.

Against predictions of conservative inevitability, in fact, Democrats did well on the Northeast and West coasts, and in the upper Midwest. Indeed, they gained everywhere but the South. The unions' results in congressional races were mixed, but union voter turnout was arguably one of their victories, all the more useful because many Republicans seem to have stayed home to vote their displeasure with Dole. With almost a quarter (23 percent) of votes for the House coming from union households, up from 14 percent in 1994, the AFL-CIO has a fulcrum in place to move at least some of Congress. Democrats also regained control of the California assembly and gained in many another state legislature. Progressive measures didn't do badly. In California, a union-financed ballot measure to restore top income tax brackets for families reporting taxable income of more than \$220,000 failed by less than three-tenths of 1 percent. But California passed another measure making it harder for local governments to raise taxes, and the notorious and

vilely named California Civil Rights Initiative showed how much life remains in the politics of resentment. (Weirdly, though, an amazing 15 percent of the voters said they supported affirmative action and still voted for the initiative that will kill it!) Conservative impulses prevail as long as majorities don't see what governments can do to improve the conditions of life.

As for the man of the hour, Bill Clinton certainly does know how to thread a needle into the twenty-first century. The master calculator's calculations (or Dick Morris's: who cares who thought of them first?) panned out. Now the burden is on the left wing of his party to push him as far as he can go—not very far, most likely, given his propensity for minimalist programs. To be relevant on this shriveled landscape, the left needs a medium-run agenda that is not only worthy but winnable. Campaign finance reform, health care, day care, more progressive taxation, and livable wages ought to be at the core. Dur-

ing the months to come, nothing would open up more space for this sort of agenda than to boost the prospects of the AFL-CIO. As long as the unions enroll fewer than one in six American workers, the limits to their influence are plain. The young legions of Union Summer did well enough to serve as a model for future recruitment, and some campus strikes, like Yale's and Barnard's, were popular enough to dent recalcitrant administrations. Still, unions, however newly invigorated, are hampered by Washington policies and a generation of corporate onslaughts. The new AFL-CIO leadership seems to know that its hopes are doomed unless unions become a popular cause. The unions expect no help for labor law reform from the new Congress, so uphill runs their—and our—struggle. □

Thanks to Dick Flacks, Michael Kazin, Jo-Ann Mort, Richard Rothstein, and Lee Siegel for comments on an earlier draft.

Sean Wilentz

ELECTION LESSONS, 1996: A TALK WITH JOHN LEWIS

The November elections produced, at best, mixed results. Apart from the marginal Democratic gains in the House and the marginal Republican gains in the Senate, the political landscape looked the same the morning after Election Day as it had the day before. Yet, as recently as mid-1995, when the Gingrich revolution was advancing at full throttle and the Clinton presidency looked doomed, hardly anyone could have foreseen the eventual outcome. What are we to make of these confusing trends? To get a sympathetic Washington insider's perspective, I spoke with Representative John Lewis of Georgia.

Lewis first won national attention for his activities in the civil rights movement, as a leader of the Nashville civil rights sit-in dem-

onstrations in 1960, as one of the Freedom Riders in 1961, and as national chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee from 1963 until 1966. He has represented Georgia's Fifth District (including the city of Atlanta) since 1987. In 1991, he was named a Democratic Chief Deputy Whip, the third-highest post in the House Democratic leadership—making him the highest-ranking black representative in either party caucus, a position he retains. In the last Congress, he was one of Speaker Newt Gingrich's most outspoken and implacable critics.

Lewis ran unopposed in 1996, both in the Georgia Democratic primary and in the general election, and he spent much of his time during the fall campaign traveling around the country

to stump for other Democrats. He spoke with me by telephone from his Washington home on November 8. The following is an edited transcript of our conversation.

—S.W.

S.W.: Immediately after the 1994 elections, you and your Democratic colleagues began working extremely hard to regain the majority in the House. In recent months, it looked as if you might actually succeed. What went wrong? And what went right?

J.L.: I think that what hurt us more than anything was that, during the last two weeks of the campaign, we were outspent. Many of our best candidates were drowned in dollars. The Republicans complained a great deal about the unions and the “big labor bosses.” But they had the Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, the Christian Coalition, and the National Rifle Association.

A few days before the election, campaign financing and foreign contributions started sticking as an issue. I think that hurt us. I am convinced that had the election been held, maybe, two weeks earlier, we would have won back the House.

I think the thing that we did right, more than anything else, was that we stayed on message. We tried to explain who we are and what we stand for. We kept saying over and over again that this effort was all about putting families first, which included protecting Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment. At the same time, we were very successful at painting many of the conservative freshman members as clones of Speaker Gingrich.

S.W.: Has the Gingrich revolution been stalled?

J.L.: I think it has. Several of the freshman members who were reelected won with very small margins. And the Republicans will have a much smaller margin to work with in the House. If they are going to be successful in doing anything, they must reach out and try to work with many of the Democratic members. Newt and his cadres now must realize that they went too far, that they are looked upon by the American people as too extreme, that they have to move

from the right to the center.

S.W.: You’ve watched the Speaker closely. How do you think he will handle things over the next two years?

J.L.: I think that probably over the first two or three months he will do his best to be less combative. But I think that his very nature, his very being, will push him to be his old self. And I think that he’ll have people like Tom DeLay and Dick Armey looking over his shoulder. So it’s going to be very hard for him. We’ll have a honeymoon for a while, but it won’t last long.

S.W.: One of the striking differences in the 1996 Democratic campaign was, as you just mentioned, the renewed prominence of the labor movement. Yet voter participation was still down, especially among low-income voters. Something seems to be missing in terms of mobilizing Democratic constituencies.

J.L.: It concerns me that every four years—or every two years, in the case of congressional elections—we have to reinvent the wheel. Labor was out there almost alone. They had the help and support of the environmental groups, but for the most part, in many districts, it was just organized labor. In many states, the party structure is in shambles. You don’t have strong state Democratic parties to turn people out for a rally, or to turn people out to vote.

S.W.: Why?

J.L.: We’ve taken things for granted for so long. We can’t do that any more. We’ve got to have strong, grassroots, organized state and county and district structures. We just can’t wait every two years or every four years to try and put something together. We’ve got to keep something in place. In some instances, very good candidates were out there almost *alone*, with some help from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. We’re going to have to sit down with the D.C.C.C., with the Democratic National Committee, maybe with some people at the White House, and start assessing what went wrong and figure out how to be more effective.

S.W.: Switching to the White House—Clinton didn’t exactly win a mandate, but he certainly . . .

J.L.: It was very close to one. He ran well.

S.W.: *What was the key to his turn-around?*

J.L.: I think that more than anything else, he bought into the message of the Democratic members of the House and Senate. I think that we came together, the Democratic members, and said that our interests were going to be in Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment. Also, the president had a simple theme—building a bridge to the twenty-first century—and I think it resonated with people.

S.W.: *The common wisdom has been that the president succeeded not by getting in sync with the House Democrats or the Senate Democrats, but by moving to the center himself, by co-opting a number of Republican issues.*

J.L.: I think that's also true. He saw a train coming, and he got on board. As you well know, he's very smart—and he's a master at taking advantage of a given situation.

S.W.: *But where does that leave those who stand up for ideas that are out of favor these days? I'm thinking particularly about the welfare bill.*

J.L.: I think we have to continue. The Democratic caucus, in spite of everything that's happened, is progressive. The people who will be molding the agenda for our caucus are going to continue to stand on those principles. We're going to work and cooperate with the president. When we can vote with him, we'll vote with him. But where there are differences, we will make them known.

S.W.: *What is the future of the welfare issue?*

J.L.: To be very candid, I don't know. Being in the minority, unless we can coalesce with some of the moderate, more progressive Republicans, it's going to be very difficult for us to move it or shape it. But there is a need to take a second look at the welfare bill that passed, and to put emphasis on job training and job placement.

S.W.: *Are there any specific proposals on job training?*

J.L.: No, we don't have anything right now. But I know that if we don't do something early next year, the clock is going to start ticking. And we don't want to have hundreds of thousands of people falling back into poverty.

S.W.: *Do you think the Republicans realize that too?*

J.L.: Some of them are very conscious of it. But for the most part, they don't want to revisit it. Not at all.

S.W.: *One thing that was notable about the Republicans in 1996, after the primaries, was that the national campaign had much less of the kind of divisive social and racial rhetoric that we have heard in the past. There was a big discussion of affirmative action in California, but nationally, the Dole campaign and, from what I could see, the national party, were not doing that.*

J.L.: I think they didn't see any great benefit in it. On the one hand, they were trying early on, through Jack Kemp, to reach out to minority voters and bring people in. They wanted to keep Colin Powell happy and try to get him to get out and campaign. At the same time, I think that divisive rhetoric would have turned off many moderate white women voters. The Republicans have a real problem with the gender gap, and to start fanning the flames of race would have been quite harmful. Instead, you saw Mr. Dole going from issue to issue, until he focused in the end on the whole money thing, campaign financing. It was like someone who was going fishing—you go to a hole and you fail to get a bite, you go to another hole and you fail to get a bite, and you just keep fishing, trying to find something that will bite. It was just almost impossible.

S.W.: *To address racial politics from a different angle: thinking about Cynthia McKinney and Sanford Bishop's successful congressional campaigns in Georgia, or Julia Carson's successful campaign in Indiana, each was a case in which a black Democratic candidate needed, and managed to get, a substantial white vote. And then, conversely, there was Gary Franks's campaign in Connecticut, where a black Republican incumbent in a white-majority district was defeated, but not on racial issues. Do these examples say anything about the strategy of relying on the courts and redistricting in order to insure black representation? Have we finally reached the point where black candidates can assemble sufficient white support if they simply run strong campaigns?*

J.L.: I think McKinney, Bishop, and Carson are examples of how black candidates can succeed in traditionally Democratic districts when they are out-front and aggressive about issues that transcend race. They appealed to the voters not along the lines of race, but on protecting working families, protecting jobs, protecting Medicare and Medicaid, protecting education and the environment. That played well.

In the case of Gary Franks, I think he was just too conservative, even for his district. The Democratic candidate came along with a message that was much more appealing to the average voter in that district.

I still think that we have not yet turned the corner to where there is no need for some court-ordered districts. The majority-black districts gave people like Bishop and McKinney a chance to establish a record, and then the voters could judge them on their records. But maybe it sends a message, that in places like south Georgia, where Sanford was elected, which is primarily rural, or Cynthia in suburban Atlanta—that people are prepared to look beyond race.

S.W.: *I don't know what it means finally to turn the corner, or whether we ever will turn the corner, but it just seems different—the country seems more mature on racial issues, at least at this level. And that might be a reason, again, why race isn't as effective anymore for the Republicans, beyond a core vote.*

J.L.: I can tell just by going campaigning for Democratic candidates down in places like Augusta and Macon. In some of the meetings, not only in Georgia but also in South Carolina, in small towns, for rural candidates, white candidates, and the audiences were predominantly white—the response was just unbelievable, unreal.

S.W.: *The response to you?*

J.L.: Uh-huh.

S.W.: *Maybe the South has changed quicker than the North . . .*

J.L.: Well, I went down with John Spratt and campaigned with him in a little community, and we had something I'd never heard of before, called a chicken bog—some type of South Carolina dish where they cook chicken and rice to-

gether. It was held in the huge backyard of a state senator who was supporting John Spratt. And they had a biracial audience—about a hundred-and-twenty-five people came out and sat there in this little rural town in low-country South Carolina. To me, it was amazing. Then, in Augusta, campaigning with David Bell, who almost won—they had a chili cookout in a little park, and most of the audience was white, but Bell had me as his special person to draw people there. So I think race is becoming less and less of a factor. And I think that the Republicans sense that.

S.W.: *What will be the major proposals to come from the White House and the congressional Democrats over the coming months?*

J.L.: We have to fix Medicare. I think the president and the Democrats—hopefully, the Republicans will buy into it—will come together and say, “Let’s do it.” If necessary, appoint a bipartisan commission to come up with some basic recommendations, and we’ll put it in legislative form and pass it. But we must fix Medicare in a way that saves it for future generations. I also think that the president, because of Al Gore’s support, will do something about cleaning up these toxic sites and getting out in front on some of the environmental issues. Some of the Republicans may resist that, because the corporate business interests won’t be happy. But I think we have to move in that direction. And we hope that the president won’t be bashful, and we won’t be bashful, about doing something to fix the welfare bill. We’ve got to assist communities in providing quality education and public safety, and in doing something about drugs and crime.

S.W.: *Still, on many of these issues and others, over at least the last six months, the White House’s approach has been very small-bore, talking about things that won’t cost a great deal, about voluntary solutions to problems, under the assumption that, as the president said, “the era of big government is over.” Is the era of big government over?*

J.L.: Well, the day of big government might be over, as we knew it. But I don’t think that the role of the federal government is over. I think that the American people want the federal government to be there when they need it. And in

order for that to happen, you have to be committed to make certain resources available, whether it's funds for airline safety, or cleaning up the toxic dump sites around the country, highways or mass transit, or whatever.

S.W.: But the idea of big federal bureaucracies . . .

J.L.: Yeah, like the health proposal. While the American people seemed to want health care for all, they found the plan confusing and overwhelming. I don't think we're going to see anything like that coming. Though I think that there are many of us who still want Congress to do something on health care. Too many people still don't have health care—it is simply unaffordable or unavailable. A lot of single-payer people are still out there who are concerned about this rush to managed care as the panacea to our problems. I think we need to consider many options.

S.W.: Do you think there's much of a future to health-care reform?

J.L.: I just don't know. With the makeup of the Ways and Means Committee, and Energy and Commerce, I don't think we'll do much along these lines. But I would hope we could make some changes, even small ones.

S.W.: Looking to the more distant future: the

campaign of 2000 has now begun, and Al Gore has made no secret about his desire to succeed Clinton. How do you see that shaping up at the moment? Is the Democratic party united in looking to Gore, or do you see other people, like Richard Gephardt, getting support?

J.L.: I think there are other people who will be looking down that road as we move along. But just looking at it, being objective, Al Gore will be the front-runner. This man has been so loyal. And the relationship between the president and Al Gore is, you can tell, an authentic and solid one. It's not just for convenience. These two guys like each other. They enjoy doing what they're doing. And I think the president is going to do whatever he can to see that Al Gore succeeds him.

S.W.: Would a challenge to Gore simply be destructive?

J.L.: Well, I would like to see our party unified, with Al Gore and the president coming out of the end of this administration with a good and solid record, with no bruising primary contest—that we have a unified effort in 2000, with Al Gore as the nominee. I can readily support him. I like him. He's decent. And I think that he'd be good on all the big issues. I'm realistic enough

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to know that the party's got to be broad enough, that we're all not going to get everything we would like in a particular candidate. The bottom line is trying to win. With the shift of the population toward the Sunbelt, it's good to have a moderate person emerging who can bring these different factions together, and hold them together, the way the president has been able to do. We need a winning streak.

S.W.: Okay, but how do you respond to those who say that moderation might win elections, but at too great a cost. That moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue, so to speak. That we can get elected, but at the cost of sacrificing

so much that the prize isn't worth the effort. That it's time to stop voting for the lesser of two evils—moderate Republicans in Democratic clothing. A lot of liberals refused to vote for Clinton this time, for precisely that reason. What do you say to them?

J.L.: Just hang in there. You have to build. And it's better to try and build with someone who will be responsive. I just think that we have to fight today and do what we can now, and be prepared for another day. But you have to take the long, hard view. It's all not going to happen in four years or eight years or twelve years. You're building for the future. □

Jo-Ann Mort

ANNE FRANK AND BOSNIA

There's scaffolding around the Anne Frank House on the Prinsengracht Canal in Amsterdam, the main thoroughfare in the now-trendy Jordaan section. A brochure you receive upon entering explains that the back annex needs a thorough restoration because of foot traffic from the more than half million annual visitors. When I arrived for a late morning visit on a Sunday last summer, there was already a line winding around the block, with tourists patiently queued up, waiting for forty-five minutes to squeeze into the tiny house and warehouse that hid the Frank family during the Nazi siege of Amsterdam. It was bright and clear, unlike the more typical overcast days of an Amsterdam summer. Yet people were more than willing to forgo the rare summer sunshine for the darkness inside this house.

It is a solemn experience, to see the ink lines on the wallpaper where the Frank children's growth was measured during their twenty-five months of hiding; to realize how profoundly small each room in the secret annex is. After my visit to her house, I went back to read Anne's

diary once more, trying to imagine so much life in such a confined space, so many people hidden behind the gauze of the window curtains.

On the day I visited, the windows were opened as they never could be for Anne. I leaned out to see lush gardens in this gentrified neighborhood with artists' studios, boutiques, second-hand bookstores, and cafés along the canal, in a part of Amsterdam that in the Franks' day was industrial—in an age when only the poor lived among industrial warehouses. I closed my eyes to imagine the stale and harsh smells of cooking, cigarette smoke, body odor, cat urine, and even human excrement that filled this desperate space with so many people squeezed inside of it.

It's possible to leave the Frank house, walk over the slim bridge, and sit directly across the canal with an espresso and a newspaper—so that Anne's house becomes part of the scenery of a Sunday brunch. The tourist boat stops in front of the house, one of the most popular stops on the "Museum Boat" tour. As respectful as the site is to the memory of Anne and her family, it

is after all only a site, only a memorial, and therefore somehow sanitized.

Just twenty minutes up the road from Amsterdam, another memorial is being established, at the International UN Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia trial in the Hague Congress building. Two days after visiting Amsterdam, I walked through several security guard posts to a near empty visitors' gallery to observe the trial of Dusko Tadic, a Bosnian Serb paramilitary man. There were plenty of seats available in the visitors' gallery; anyone could walk in on any morning, I was told.

Apparently, the trial has been sparsely attended all along. On the morning I was there, perhaps a dozen others—at most—were in the gallery watching behind the bulletproof glass windows. Several of those in attendance appeared to be diplomatic or UN staff. A handful of reporters were there. An article that happened to run in the *Guardian* while I was in the Hague pointed out that only the *Guardian* and a very few other European news organizations—a Dutch paper, *Le Monde*, Reuters—have covered the trial in a steady way, while both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* have covered it inconsistently, and the rest of the media have virtually ignored it. Court TV, which covered the O.J. Simpson trial gavel to gavel, gives two-hour-long highlights daily.

A Bosnian Muslim witness named Hasa Isic, born in Kozarac, was testifying against Tadic, whom he had known since school days. This construction worker moved slowly with a limp as he took his seat in the witness stand. He offered several times to get up and use the pointer to show exactly where he was held or tortured—a model of the Omarska concentration camp was set up in the middle of the courtroom.

Isic appeared anxious to assist the prosecution. He didn't hesitate to talk. He was soft-spoken but assertive. He told the now-familiar story about how all the men over age sixteen were rounded up in buses and taken away from their town, and how others fled from the constant shelling. "On June 14, Serbian forces came to collect Muslim men. . . . I saw a tank in front of my house and soldiers ordered men to separate

from women and also boys under sixteen and took us to the truck and placed us on buses and we were taken away to Karaten [a concentration camp] and held in Room #2 until the seventh or eighth of July . . . it stank, almost no food . . . prisoners regularly beaten, tortured, killed and disappeared . . . they started with my explaining my heritage, my forefathers, and so on . . ."

From there, Isic and about fifty others were transferred to the more notorious camp, Omarska. He described an encounter when he was "directly face to face with Tadic and ordered to greet the Serbs in the Serb way: 'God be with you, heroes.'" Isic continued: "One immediately put a noose around my neck and pulled it and another dealt such a heavy blow. I fell on my stomach, they were beating me with all sorts of things. I lost consciousness . . . lying among other battered people . . . a guard entered and walked over to us to look for the dead. I let out a cry of pain to which the guard responded, 'He's alive, but not for long.' Other prisoners carried out the dead. Tadic said: 'You'll remember Isic, you cannot look at a Serb or say anything to a Serb.'"

More stunning than the testimony, which can be read in transcript or even watched in segments cluttered among commercials on Court TV, was the chance to observe Tadic up close: a simple peasant face, banal evil. Tadic was sandwiched between two crew-cut guards, behind his court-appointed trio of lawyers. He kept tight rein on his facial expressions, occasionally managing a half-moon smile or a turn of the head in defiance. I kept waiting for him to react with visible horror to the events being described, but of course that wouldn't happen, since either he or his comrades committed these—and much worse—atrocities, reportedly with enthusiasm.

As I leaf back through my notes, I recall the sensations that came over me in the courtroom. I tried to picture the lush, raw beauty of Bosnia, destroyed by warfare. I thought about the Nuremberg trials, trying to imagine a world that could learn from the experience of the Nazis and react with appropriate will. I thought about Anne Frank spending the last month of her life in Bergen-Belsen. I considered the streets of Amsterdam's Jewish quarter practically cleansed of Jews. I thought about the countless Holocaust

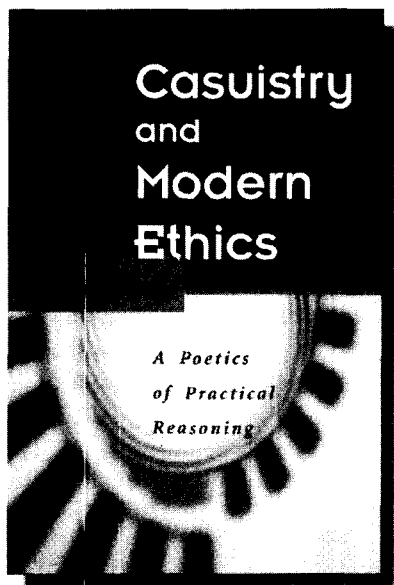
memorials I'd visited throughout Europe, Israel, and the United States. As I sat in the courtroom, I felt a deep consciousness of being Jewish—but this time, Jews were not the ones marked for extinction.

Would more people be watching were the trial held in Bosnia? Probably, but that would be an audience made up of the victims. What about an audience of the rest of us? Does Europe—or America for that matter—prefer not to acknowledge this present-day holocaust? Can we only memorialize torture and death decades later? What good is memory if we don't use it to incite action against further atrocities?

Some say that Tadic is only a flunky for Karadzic, Mladic, and Milosovic, and use that

as an excuse to explain away the sparse crowds. Doubtless if any one of them were on trial—as they should be—the courtroom would be filled, as would the press galleries, cameras whirring, pens and computers recording the spectacle. But so far, the United States and Europe have decided not to deliver these war criminals to the courtroom where they belong.

Anne Frank was only a typical Jew who happened to keep a diary. Like her, the witnesses in this trial are people who have a story to tell. Unlike her, they have escaped death to tell it. These are not stories recorded in sophisticated prose, the early work of a talented stylist who died in Bergen-Belsen. Rather, they are the simple oral tales of a daily hell. Yet the so-called civilized world is deaf to the stories. Perhaps they will gain an audience, once they are packaged through the safe distance of time. □



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Jennifer Holdaway

CHINA'S DISSENTERS

What's Happened Since Tiananmen?

Beijing's repression of the 1989 protest movement and the purge that followed resulted in the death, imprisonment, or exile of thousands of Chinese. With some notable exceptions, exile organizations have foundered, losing their sense of purpose or staggering under financial scandals and internal strife. Yet inside China, many dissenters have not given up.

Since 1992, many students and intellectuals arrested in connection with the 1989 protest movement have been released, some for medical reasons and some, controversially, for "good behavior." Once out of prison, few have shown much penitence. Forced and voluntary exile have depleted their ranks, but the New York-based organization Human Rights in China currently monitors the activities of at least a hundred human rights workers in Beijing alone.

In contrast to the heady scenes in Tiananmen Square, China's dissidents today talk not of democratic revolution but of a laborious process of democratic reform in which the construction of an independent legal system, the development of civil associations, and the growth of a sense of citizenship are more important than the removal of the Communist party or particular leaders from power.

This moderation is not entirely new. Most of China's dissidents have always been reformist, and many of their current activities are an extension of trends that began before 1989. But the commitment of so many individuals to a slow and long-term struggle is a departure from the past. In spite or perhaps because of Tiananmen, more people are signing petitions, joining unofficial organizations, and challenging police and judicial abuses. Now, as the Chi-

nese authorities embark on a new wave of repression, many are also facing detention and imprisonment.

The dissident community includes veterans of the 1978-1981 Democracy Wall movement like Wei Jingsheng and Liu Nianchun, student leaders from the 1989 protest like Wang Dan, and many new recruits who have joined the movement since 1989. Diversity of age, educational background, and occupation among China's dissenters has never been greater. Here I will focus on grassroots human rights and labor activists.

Reversing the Verdict on Tiananmen

One major concern of human rights activists is reversing the government's assessment of the 1989 protest movement as a "counterrevolutionary rebellion." A series of open letters and petitions has appealed for a revision of this verdict. One petition, in May 1995, was signed by forty-five prominent scientists, intellectuals, and dissidents.

In the past, relatives of dissidents rarely challenged the authorities for fear of making things worse. But last year, twenty-seven relatives of people killed on June 4 submitted a petition to the National People's Congress calling for a reassessment of the movement. One couple is now collecting the names of all those who died. Over the last few years Wei Jingsheng's sister has lobbied governments and international institutions to press for his release, and the wives of several other imprisoned dissidents have made public appeals on their behalf.

This new boldness is due partly to a mas-

sive shift in public opinion over the last fifteen years. When Wei Jingsheng was arrested in 1979, few spoke in his defense. At that time, dissenters' families were often ostracized by neighbors and co-workers. Most Chinese are still unwilling to risk their own security by speaking out, but many admire those who do. At the very least, says Hu Ping, editor of the New York-based dissident magazine *Beijing Spring*, "ordinary people no longer think people the government calls counterrevolutionaries deserve whatever they get."

Suing the State

Official sponsorship of limited legal reform is having unintended consequences. In the late 1980s the "new legalism" began spilling over into the political sphere, as scholars began to lecture on the need for due process and respect for citizens' rights. Some even argued, in official and semi-official legal journals, that "counterrevolution" was a political, not a legal, concept.

Since 1989, activists have been applying these principles, some of them consciously following the example of the Czech Charter 77 movement. Until this year, there was no presumption of innocence in Chinese law, and lawyers for the accused were expected to plead only for leniency. But in 1991, lawyers for Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao, founders of an independent research organization, boldly defended their clients against the charge of being "black hands" behind the 1989 protests.

Liu Qing, who served ten years for his involvement in the Democracy Wall movement and is now chairman of Human Rights in China, reports that at least thirty people have sued the authorities for violations of their constitutional rights or the Chinese legal code. Among them is the ever-recalcitrant Wei Jingsheng. Sentenced in December 1995 to another prison term of fourteen years, he sued the Beijing police for detaining him for twenty months without trial. Liu Qing's brother, Liu Nianchun, also sued the state for a three-year "Reeducation through Labor" sentence he received in May 1996 for his role in several petitions. Liu served three years in the eighties for smuggling Liu Qing's prison

memoirs out of the country.

Both Wei's and Liu's suits were recently rejected, and lawyers who have represented dissidents have met with reprisals. But the real significance of all this lies in the willingness of a growing number of Chinese to challenge the state. To a government that is used to intimidating its citizens into silence, this persistence is a disturbing trend. Even more alarming is the specter of a nascent independent workers' movement.

As in other "workers' states," China's official trade union, the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), exists more to carry out government policy than to represent the working class. Since the mid-1970s, when reports of strikes in several Chinese cities filtered out, Chinese workers have increasingly resorted to independent action.

Many Democracy Wall activists were self-educated workers who drew attention to the contradiction between official ideology and real life in China's factories. Articles in their unofficial journals occasionally made admiring references to Polish Solidarity (on which the official media reported until Deng announced his support for martial law in December 1981).

Workers were punished severely for their involvement with Democracy Wall, even when their criticisms came from a Marxist perspective. Wei Jingsheng, who publicly called Deng a dictator, received a fifteen-year prison sentence. But so did Xu Wenli, a democratic socialist who regarded himself as a supporter of Deng. Shortly before his arrest, Xu had been involved in discussions with worker-activists from around the country about the possibility of starting an independent national publication.

With many of the Democracy Wall leaders in prison and others mindful of their fate, pressure for political reform came mostly from intellectual and cultural circles in the 1980s. But labor unrest increased steadily. The right to strike was deleted from the 1982 Constitution on the grounds that "contradictions" between workers and enterprises had been eliminated, but there were official reports of more than seven hundred strikes in the first ten months of 1988, one of them lasting three months.

In 1989, tens of thousands of workers took to the streets in sympathy with the students. At least thirty workers' organizations were formed, the largest of which, the Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation (BWAFF), claimed thousands of members by the end of May. Its demands included not only wage increases and anticorruption measures but, most significantly, the right to represent workers' interests as an independent labor union.

Many ACFTU members also attended the protests, with the tacit approval of their leaders. On May 18, the organization actually donated about \$25,000 to the protests while its hard-line president was out of the country. In the last days of the movement, ACFTU members also participated in meetings of the Capital Liaison Group, organized by Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao to promote dialogue among students, intellectuals, the BWAFF, and other citizens' groups. Despite fierce disagreements among the participants, this group represented the government's worst nightmare—bridge-building among intellectual dissidents, workers, and other disaffected members of society.

The BWAFF was short-lived, and workers were harshly punished for their role in the protests. Most of those who died on the night of June 3 were not students, but workers and ordinary citizens, and workers generally received heavier prison sentences afterward.

Unrest and Strikes

Worker unrest has continued to rise since 1989 in response to the upheavals of government-sponsored economic reform. Wages have risen, but prices have followed them, and new workers in state-owned enterprises no longer have job security. Some estimates put unemployment at forty million in urban areas alone. Migrant workers who leave their villages to seek work in Special Economic Zones and cities are particularly vulnerable since they lack the urban residence status that would entitle them to state benefits. Estimated at over a hundred million people, many in this floating population have no access to medical care, education, or adequate housing.

Industrial safety is a widespread problem,

especially in minimally regulated private operations. Safety standards have not changed since the 1950s, and there are frequent reports of fires and avoidable accidents. Government statistics, which almost certainly underestimate the problem, indicate that over twenty thousand workers were killed in industrial accidents in 1994, including more than ten thousand miners.

In 1993, the government stopped denying the reality of strikes and reported nearly ten thousand industrial actions for that year. More than twelve thousand labor disputes were reported for 1995, mostly over unpaid wages, lack of job security, and working conditions. Exiled labor leader Han Dongfang says that the official union, ACFTU, plays the good cop in these conflicts, coaxing workers back to work with promises of concessions. In fact, some of the strikers' immediate demands (usually for back pay) are often met to avoid riots, but any identifiable leaders are promptly dealt with.

Most of these strikes and work stoppages have been spontaneous, but there have also been several attempts to establish independent unions. In May 1992, sixteen people were arrested in connection with the clandestine Free Trade Union of China (FTUC), which called in its founding statement for the right to organize free trade unions, improved working conditions, and the release of political prisoners. In 1994, the organizers were sentenced to prison terms of between seven and twenty years, "killing the chickens for the monkeys to watch," as the Chinese say.

Subsequent organizations have sought safety in publicity. March 1994 saw the founding of the League for the Protection of the Rights of Working People, whose organizers include Liu Qing's brother, Liu Nianchun, as well as several lawyers and professors. The league welcomed not only workers, but also intellectuals, peasants, and entrepreneurs. Only "corrupt officials" were specifically excluded. A carefully worded petition submitted to the National People's Congress characterized the league as an "interest group not a political party" and called for improvements in health care and working conditions and for the restoration of the constitutional right to strike, the extension of union rights to peasants, and the disclosure of party

and government officials' assets and income. Predictably, the league's attempt to register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs was rejected and several of its organizers have been arrested.

Han Dongfang, exiled leader of the BWAFF and editor of the Hong Kong-based *China Labor Bulletin*, is determined to continue working for workers' rights and independent unions, even if it means going back to jail when Hong Kong reverts to Chinese rule. Describing himself as a "real socialist," he criticizes the Communist party for permitting increasing inequality of wealth and failing to provide for workers' welfare. He is equally wary of "democrats" who say that workers must postpone their demands until economic development provides the basis for democracy. He supports the efforts of organizations such as the League for the Protection of the Rights of Working People, but insists that only protests initiated by workers can form the basis for an independent union movement.

Even before the current crackdown, China's grassroots organizers faced constant obstruction and persecution. The law permits independent associations (at least a thousand now run national operations) but severely limits the scope of their activity. To register, associations must have the approval of the "mass organization" responsible for that sector of the population (ACFTU, the All China Women's Federation, and so on). Independent groups may not duplicate the activities of official organizations, and the 1992 Trade Union Law specifically forbids the establishment of unions not affiliated with ACFTU.

Less controversial groups, including some women's rights groups, manage to circumvent these regulations by hooking up to official organizations or academic departments that are willing to provide cover. Some local branches of the All China Women's Federation also seem to pursue a somewhat independent agenda. But this is not an option for human rights and workers' organizations. Since 1989, ACFTU has shown no outward signs of disloyalty to the regime.

The government has also passed regulations against many of the dissidents' new tactics. Writings or speech harmful to "state security" is defined as "sabotage," as is the establishment

of social groups or business enterprises for the same purpose. Cooperating with or accepting funds from foreign organizations is expressly forbidden.

Where none of these charges is applicable, the government continues to accuse dissidents of offenses such as hooliganism, traffic violations, and the misuse of official funds. Dissidents and their relatives are routinely arrested during international events like the UN Women's Conference or sent on "vacation" in distant provinces with a police escort. Interference with employment, marriage licenses, and resident permits is commonplace.

Looking to the Future

Over the last few months the government has been flexing its muscles, arresting and sentencing many dissidents in an attempt to intimidate the rest and demonstrate its indifference to international opinion. Human Rights in China estimates that at least twenty dissidents have been sentenced this year and many more detained without trial. The student leader Wang Dan received the harshest treatment. Held in secret detention since May 1995, he was sentenced in October 1996 to an eleven-year prison term. A number of other activists fled the country, and those who remain are likely to be cautious for a while.

Although they clearly face another period of repression, dissidents hope that the long-awaited death of Deng Xiaoping will bring a change in the political climate. But many of the obstacles they face will outlive Deng.

Although elections have been held for local-level congresses for some years now, most Chinese have little experience with democratic institutions. And despite encouraging trends such as those reported here, civil society remains weak in relation to the state. The middle class so beloved of transition theorists is still small and geographically limited. Outside urban areas, literacy levels are falling as parents take their children out of school to work and the rising cost of education puts it beyond their reach. In rural areas, it is clan organizations, traditional religion, and secret societies that are on the rise, not human rights groups.

Ironically, many who support democracy as

a long-term goal espouse some variant of enlightened authoritarianism in the short term. China's level of development, they argue, cannot support a democratic system, and only a strong central government with restrictions on popular participation can provide the stability needed for development and eventual democratization. In this construction of the options for China's future, the prosperity of Asia's newly industrializing countries is contrasted with the fragmentation and chaos of the former Soviet Union.

For those who seek social justice as well as civil rights, the odds are even more formidable. Economic reform without political accountability has caused mounting inequality and corruption as officials at all levels use their public power to accumulate private wealth. The process will be hard to reverse. Even if the transition after Deng's death is smooth and its direction liberal (neither of which is guaranteed), China's human rights and labor activists will still have plenty to do. □

David Ost

CAN UNIONS SURVIVE COMMUNISM?

Workers have had a difficult time in the move to a market economy in Eastern Europe. In the first few years after 1989, prices skyrocketed and real wages plummeted. Hundreds of thousands have lost once-secure jobs. In June 1996, even the Gdansk Shipyard, the factory that set in motion the fall of communism with its Solidarity strike of 1980, was thrust into bankruptcy proceedings. New jobs often lack basic health and safety protections, and are frequently outside the legal economy altogether. Social benefits paid for by factories have eroded dramatically, as enterprises change from being social institutions to economic ones. Overall, labor has taken a beating.

One would expect trade unions to grow during a time like this. Unions are relatively easy to form in Eastern Europe, and in most firms more than one union exists. And yet unions have been in dramatic decline throughout the region. In Poland, Solidarity fell from 9.5 million in 1981 to 2.5 million in 1990 and 1.3 million today. In Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia, union membership has also declined considerably. Even more ominous is that in the fast-growing private sphere, the tendency is toward no unions at all. As Eastern Europe moves toward capitalism, many East European workers

see trade unions as relics of communism.

How did this come about? There are two main ways to explain it. Either communism is responsible or capitalism is.

Culpable communism: Being considered the "leading class" in the communist era is a distinct disadvantage in the capitalist one. It is not that labor really was strong during the communist era. (There were no independent unions, after all, to articulate what labor really wanted.) But workers were *supposed* to be privileged then, and the discrediting of communism has meant the discrediting of all its key propositions. As workers' institutions, mandatory under the old regime, unions have become suspect. Contemporary notions of justice scrap any idea of special rights for workers: policies should benefit "citizens," perhaps "the nation," but not "workers." Since 1989, the very term "working class" has made people squirm. It conjures up images of old men in badly tailored suits. Even workers seem unable to imagine the need to organize on behalf of their own specific interests. In the postcommunist era there often seems to be something downright reactionary about pressing for the rights of "workers" per se.

Culpable capitalism: According to this view, communism had to give way to "struc-

tural adjustment,” entailing elimination of subsidies and budget deficits and the streamlining of enterprises to make them globally competitive. “Economic necessity” required an end to employment guarantees and low prices on essentials, and there is nothing labor can do about it.

Not surprisingly, the second view is more popular among Western observers. Indeed, both right and left see capitalism as the cause of labor’s crisis, with the difference that the former applaud it while the latter bemoan it. A look at the historical record, however, shows both factors to be crucial. All unions in Eastern Europe have faced tough battles with the coming of capitalism, but how they react depends largely on the legacy of their struggle against communism.

Poland and Czechoslovakia

If all the countries in the region had gone through an identical process, we could embrace both of these perspectives and just say labor is doomed. In fact, however, the specifics of each country tell a different story.

The story of labor’s demise generalizes too much from the Polish experience. For if there was one country where labor was expected to do well in the new era, it was Poland. The long and successful struggle of Solidarity suggested that here workers would have the organizational clout, the resources, and the determination to defend themselves in the new era. Workers seemed to have gained political power with Solidarity’s electoral victory in 1989 and Lech Walesa’s presidential victory one year later. The early fears of foreign investors that Poland would be too friendly to labor seemed eminently justified. If any worker-friendly “capitalism with a human face” were possible, surely it would take shape here, under the watchful eyes of the electrician-president.

But things did not turn out that way. In 1990, the first Solidarity government introduced a program of economic shock therapy. As planned, prices skyrocketed, real wages plummeted, enterprises began extensive layoffs. And Solidarity the trade union did nothing. Its leaders, like the government’s—too often the same people—argued that “there is no other way.” Lech Walesa

gave his unconditional support. Union leaders came out on record *against* the revival of a strong Solidarity, embracing the neoliberal view of unions as an obstacle to reform and thus bad even for workers in the long run. Solidarity had internalized the view (one refuted by postwar West European practice, it should be noted) that unions could only be a drain on economic development.

In other words, at the moment when it was finally free, Solidarity stopped acting as a trade union. Buying into a painful economic reform package may well have been wise, since the economy obviously had to undergo a difficult transformation. But this is not what Solidarity did. Instead of striking a deal, the union offered the government total support, and the government gave the union nothing in return. Instead of bargaining, Solidarity capitulated, committing itself to a program it would have no role in generating. In this way, the postcommunist era was ushered in with unions virtually invisible. There were no collective bargaining arrangements at the bottom (wage levels were set from above); there was no tripartite council at the top. Solidarity even gave away other sources of employee power when it agreed to the abolition of employee councils in firms moving away from state ownership. Workers were left with little way to articulate, let alone defend, their interests. Poland’s new capitalist institutions *began* with the exclusion of labor, and this original sin has endured.

If in 1989 Poland seemed to be labor’s great hope, Czechoslovakia seemed to be a lost cause. No independent workers’ movement had developed there even in 1968, during the Prague Spring, so it was no surprise that the 1980s also passed without labor activism. Czech workers sleepwalked their way into the future. When they finally stepped onto the political stage, with a strike in late November 1989, the old regime was already on the verge of collapse. The dissident intellectual organization Civic Forum had emerged as the dominant new force, and although the strikers assisted the Civic Forum activists, no labor representatives entered the hallowed body themselves. When Civic Forum, not surprisingly, emerged with a fiercely

neoliberal ideology, Czech labor seemed doomed to marginalization. Investors looking warily at Poland saw Czechoslovakia as the emerging capitalist haven where all of the old regime's guarantees for labor could be shed without remorse. If labor seemed poised to defend its interests in Poland, it seemed doomed to take a beating in the Czech lands.

Yet it is precisely here that labor has had its greatest success. Despite its reputation as the country in which capitalism has gone farthest—a reputation due to the relentless neoliberal rhetoric of Prime Minister Václav Klaus and impressive (though misleading) official figures on the extent of privatization—both individual workers and organized labor emerged in a better position than in Poland. Czech unemployment has hovered at about 3 percent to 4 percent, compared to about 15 percent in Poland and Hungary (in rural provinces, often much worse). Czech unions won early representation on a prominent nationwide Tripartite Council, something denied Polish unions until 1994, after the pattern of neglect had been established.

Cooperation between government and unions made this possible. The government's fear of inflation combined with unionists' fear of unemployment led to an arrangement in which both sides were able to claim victory. The arrangement consisted of many pieces, such as a devaluation of the crown, union acceptance of low real wages, and flexible bankruptcy rules. Devaluation and low real wages helped keep inflation down, but they also helped keep unemployment down. As recent Yale Ph.D. Mitchell Orenstein notes, "Low real wages . . . reduced the social costs of the transformation by keeping marginal laborers employed, while an undervalued crown kept marginal exporters in business, allowing them to employ more labor." Union acceptance of declining real wages (27 percent in 1991 alone) is not normally seen as a gain for employees. But Czech unions had watched as real wages plummeted by a similar amount in Poland in 1990 together with a dramatic increase in unemployment. In this situation, Czech unions accepted the wage reduction in return for commitments on employment.

Since wage and exchange rate adjustments could not suffice to make firms profitable, the

Czech government also had to go easy on bankruptcies. It did this by maintaining outright subsidies to large industrial dinosaurs, particularly in the steel sector, and by refusing to enforce a bankruptcy act passed by parliament in 1991. Moreover, the government took an active rather than reactive labor market approach, combating what unemployment there was through policies of job creation and retraining, in contrast to the simple cash payments generally relied on in Poland.

Benefits for labor included more than just low unemployment. Although the privatization program did not allow direct employee ownership, a universal voucher program distributed property to the citizenry at large (in contrast to Poland, which emphasized sales to individual investors). Labor also gained here by the government's bankruptcy policy, which reduced the fear of unemployment in privatized firms. In the workplace, meanwhile, Czech unions won limited co-determination rights in privatized firms (again in contrast to Poland, where Solidarity sanctioned the withering away of the powerful Employee Councils). All in all, labor's better deal derives not from any "natural" advantages enjoyed by the Czech economy but by policies worked out between government and unions. Whereas Poland utilized a prolabor discourse to mask a neoliberal policy, the Czech Republic employed a neoliberal discourse to disguise a prolabor policy.

The Legacy of Labor Anti-Communism

This comparison shows that there was no single economic logic demanding the marginalization of labor. That has been a political process, not an economic one. Still, why should the country with the stronger labor movement end up in a worse place than the one where labor had for so long been dormant?

The answer seems to lie in the nature of labor's opponents. Whereas Polish unions defined themselves in the struggle against communism, independent Czech unions emerged at the time of nascent capitalism. Whereas 1989 in Poland appeared to mean that labor had finally won, in Czechoslovakia it meant that labor had to start organizing. The paradox is that

labor has done better in the Czech Republic than in Poland precisely *because* it had been insignificant earlier. Without any question of their coming to power, Czech unions could survive only by realizing their institutional role of defending the interests of their members.

That process began in November 1989. With the press still in the hands of the party, the actual organizing of the strike had to be done by hundreds of individual activists, including young workers drawn to militance by the intoxicating new images of freedom, as well as savvy older union officials bent on survival, realizing that the moment to recreate themselves was at hand. When the communist system toppled only weeks after the strike had ended, this motley group of November activists positioned themselves to be the new union leaders. They were ready to form new trade unions, but the official leaders of the old trade unions, suddenly announcing that they were democrats too, invited the new activists to run for election in the existing structures. With an eye to the latter's crucial organizational and physical assets, the activists agreed, and democratically took control in March 1990.

Now that they had control, they still had to gain legitimacy. What were unions to do in the new epoch? They could not simply relinquish decision-making authority to the government, because, unlike in Poland, neither historical, institutional, nor personal ties linked them to the new government. Perhaps more important, they could not do so because the government didn't have a plan, either. Market thought had not taken hold in Czechoslovakia to the extent it had in Hungary or Poland. And so, whereas the latter two countries were ready to introduce their new economic programs in 1990, the Czechs used 1990 to discuss what that program should be.

This gave the union (CSKOS) its great opportunity. Instead of simply sanctioning a reform package, as in Poland, it helped create one. The union needed to consolidate its position among its members precisely at the moment when fundamental discussions about the new economy were taking place, and when the new government needed legitimacy as much as the unions did. With no promarket legacy to fall back on,

and with hard-line communists (who had formed a rival union) pressing from the outside, CSKOS had to define itself by its efforts to protect workers against the coming of the market. CSKOS first gave notice of its influence in November 1990, when it called a national strike alert to protest government plans outlawing political strikes and denying unions a say in dismissals. It is questionable whether they could have pulled a strike off—unlike Polish workers (but much like Hungarians), Czechs are quite unaccustomed to strikes—but the threat helped modify the government's proposals. Prime Minister Klaus backed down. The new union leaders needed to win concessions, and the new government leaders needed to win popular support. An organizational logic pushed the unions into opposition, and Klaus's political ambitions led him to compromise. This scenario gave labor the clout it lacked elsewhere. It also confirms the view that the only way for labor to win its rights is to fight for them.

Although economists and transition theorists are unanimous about the advantages of early marketization, the Czech example suggests that tardiness is better for labor. Better for labor to be a negotiator in the transition than a too-willing accomplice. The Czech Republic's unpreparedness for marketization helped labor by forcing the government to turn to it for support. So pervasive was market belief in Poland that shock therapists could win *workers* over by saying they would push "real" marketization. (Lech Walesa won the presidency in 1990 by saying he would *accelerate* marketization.) Czech workers, however, not having had market economics pushed at them by government and opposition alike, did not yet "know" that capitalism was in their best interests. For the new government to convince them it was, it had to make concessions unnecessary in Poland.

Late marketization also helped labor in that it kept the old nomenklatura at bay. In Poland and Hungary, not to mention Russia, the communist elite began creating a market economy to serve its own interests years before the political transition: "spontaneous privatization," it's been called, meaning the theft of state-owned wealth by the bureaucracy turned kleptocracy. In this way, labor got cut out of the picture be-

fore it could fight to be included. Czech property, on the other hand, could be parceled out in an inclusive fashion only because the tardiness of reform prevented the nomenklatura from enriching itself first.

A final factor explaining Czech labor's better position is, ironically, its lack of political affiliations. In Poland, labor was firmly behind the market reformers. In Hungary, labor was divided between unions loyal to the ex-Communists and unions allied with the liberal opposition. Only in Czechoslovakia was labor up for grabs. In the crucial first years, therefore, when the postcommunist institutional arrangements and industrial relations structures were set up, parties and politicians had to fight to win Czech labor's support. Only here was pluralism able to do what it is supposed to do.

What Has Happened to Solidarity?

What do the different ways in which labor has been integrated into the new system mean for politics? The answer is that it has helped consolidate democracy in the Czech Republic while jeopardizing democratic stability in Poland. In 1996, while Czech unions have stayed in the democratic political mainstream, Solidarity has embarked on an extended flirtation with the illiberal right that could bring dangerous results in the future.

Although labor in the Czech Republic may be in a better position than in Poland, that does not mean that Czech workers are satisfied with their lot. Low wages might help maintain employment, but that does not make them popular. Moreover, in the last couple of years Klaus has renewed his campaign against labor, citing budgetary problems to justify cutbacks in key areas, leading to a huge hospital strike in March 1996 and general dissatisfaction with the direction of reform. Nevertheless, the achievement of Czech "social liberalism," as Orenstein calls it, has been to ensure that dissent is expressed within an established liberal democratic framework. When Czech voters turned away from Klaus's Civic Democratic party in the June 1996 elections, they did not embrace the ex-Communists, as in Poland or Hungary, but turned instead to authentic reformist social democrats.

Although the hard-line left and right did gather about 20 percent of the total vote, suggesting increasing anger as hardships continue, organized labor remains firmly behind the committed democratic parties.

In Poland it's another story, as the liberals' complete disregard for labor has finally led labor to disregard the liberals. Unfortunately, this has meant not just a rejection of economic liberalism but very often a rejection of political liberalism as well.

The first to move in that direction was the Solidarity leader in Szczecin, Marian Jurczyk, who broke off in 1989 to form his own union, provocatively called Solidarity '80. Although Solidarity '80 attacked the effects of shock therapy, its proclaimed target was not the market but the "aliens" who were allegedly distorting it. The market is a good thing, Jurczyk said, if run by "real Poles." The problem is that it is dominated by "communists" (in their new role as "capitalists"), foreigners, and Jews.

By 1992, three years of experience with shock therapy had left workers susceptible to any apparently antimarket appeals. In the summer, both Solidarity '80 and the old "official" union (OPZZ) organized a series of strikes demanding higher pay, an end to the crippling wage tax, and more role for workers in deciding economic policy. Solidarity stood at a crossroads: either join the discontented and break with the government or risk marginalization itself. It decided on the former path, inaugurating a chaotic process that is still not over.

This process began in earnest in 1993, when Solidarity led a massive strike campaign of teachers and hospital workers and then forced the ouster of the government of Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka, despite that government's Solidarity pedigree. When new elections produced a government led by ex-Communists but essentially following the economic policy of the Solidarity liberals before them, the union moved to a new vision of politics in which communism and liberalism are seen as two sides of the same coin. What joins the two, says Solidarity today, is their lack of concern with "the Polish nation." In Solidarity's new view, both commu-

nists and liberals care only about the elite—that is, about themselves—and “real Poles” are left to wallow in the gutter.

Although mobilized to militance by the economic crisis, Solidarity is so tied to its anticommunist past that it has not been able to give up faith in communism’s putative enemy, the market. Paradoxically, it attacks the liberals and ex-Communists for not being promarket enough. In a “real” market economy, says Solidarity, workers are treated fairly and are rewarded for their work, whereas Polish elites, who are not “real Poles,” are rewarded for their connections. Unable to develop any compelling antimarket narrative, Solidarity seeks substitute enemies through a new nationalism.

The most extreme representative of this new tendency in Solidarity is Zygmunt Wrzodak, from the powerful Ursus Tractor Plant in Warsaw. Wrzodak combines populist, Proudhonian faith in small enterprise owned by workers with a conviction about the need for a strong state run on Christian principles to protect “the nation” against its enemies. And the enemies (again defined as “aliens”) are all over the place: they are the communists, capitalists, Russians, Americans, Europeans, foreigners, and Jews. Wrzodak has led a number of militant demonstrations, including the first violent ones of the post-1989 era, in which the government is denounced for selling out the interests of the nation. At one antigovernment march in May 1995, Wrzodak supporters chanted “To the Gas!” as the names of government leaders (none of whom were Jewish), were read from the podium.

Solidarity president Marian Krzaklewski has criticized Wrzodak as extreme, even “proto-fascist.” Yet even Krzaklewski sees himself as squarely on the political right, and he has recently organized a broad “right-wing” coalition for the 1997 parliamentary elections. He plays to the same themes as Wrzodak, though without the aggressiveness or open bigotry. Religious, nationalist, anticommunist, masculinist (anti-abortion rights, family wages for men), and even “tough-on-crime” themes play an important part in this new-right coalition.

On specifically union issues, Solidarity has some interesting ideas. It calls for a reversal of the privatization process (described as booty for

nomenklatura thieves) and the introduction of a program of “universal ownership,” whereby workers would receive, one-time only, a voucher worth several thousand dollars to invest where they choose. Yet this proposal shows the same fundamental problem mentioned earlier: a reluctance to think of union members as “workers” rather than “citizens.” For even if workers thereby get some capital, they would still be workers, and Solidarity’s proposal does nothing at all to address problems of low wages, tenuous or nonexistent contracts, unemployment, or unsafe working conditions. Solidarity is still living out its existential crisis: shaped so intrinsically by the struggle against communism, it still does not know how to wage normal union battles against capital. Disdaining the prosaic nature of contract talks, it focuses exclusively on big issues. It is no surprise that workers react by leaving the union. In opinion polls since 1991, when asked who best represents their interests, workers overwhelmingly choose the category “no one.”

It is quite easy to attack Solidarity’s right-wing turn. The liberal press in Poland, anxious to tar all opponents of the market as irrational fundamentalists, delights in it. But precisely for that reason, we’d do better to understand it. And it is better understood as the treachery of the intellectuals than the irrationalism of the masses. Solidarity has moved to the right because its erstwhile liberal and democratic socialist allies have pushed it there. Between 1980 and 1989, the intellectuals who had won the workers’ trust moved from being champions of political liberalism to being champions of economic liberalism. They squandered that trust when they pushed Solidarity into support of a radical marketization program whose true social costs they disguised. Solidarity invested considerable social capital to support shock therapy for three crucial years. But liberals assigned workers little role in the transition except to sacrifice on behalf of a “greater good” that conspicuously left them out. So insistent were the liberal intellectuals (former Solidarity ideologues) that shock therapy was mandated by “freedom,” “democracy,” “reason,” and other good things that now

the only way many unionists can think their way out of liberal economics is to think their way out of liberal politics too. Workers have drifted to the right because liberals pushed them there.

For it's not as if everyone's been hard hit by the collapse of communism. The party officials who began their own "market transition" even before 1989, transforming their contacts into capital, have weathered the transition quite well. Solidarity's former intellectual elite, meanwhile, has become today's elite of government officials, political consultants, economic advisers, and corporate middle management. Educated professionals and the old communist nomenclatura have so far been the chief beneficiaries of the "transition to democracy," and they have risen on the backs of workers they now care little about.

When the last communist government in 1989 tried to shut the Gdansk Shipyard, intellectuals denounced the move as treachery. When today's government shut the shipyard, as was announced in June 1996, liberals spoke of "market rationality" and threw the blame on Soli-

darity. Indeed, given the record of the past seven years, it's surprising that the antiliberal backlash is not greater than it is.

As Maciej Jankowski, leader of Warsaw Solidarity, recently said, "Solidarity is still not a normal trade union." And as long as the trade unions are not normal, neither is the democratic system. The long communist experience has left unions hard-pressed to act in defense of workers against capital, and without protection against the economic effects of liberalism, there is little that binds workers to the political principles of democracy. Organizing against capital is the best way of stabilizing democracy. The New Dealers in the United States knew this quite well. The Czechs stumbled into it accidentally. The Poles are learning it the hard way. Unions will survive, but whether they will integrate workers into a flourishing democratic society or by their inaction drive workers deep into the morass and far to the right we still do not know. □

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Labor and the Intellectuals

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REBUILDING THE ALLIANCE

Even the most sober-spirited could not help but feel a thrill seeing the long line of people on the steps of Columbia University's Low Library on October 3, trying to get into the opening session of a "Teach-In with the Labor Movement." Some 1,300 students, unionists, and teachers crammed Low's rotunda and nearby rooms while hundreds more stood by outdoor loudspeakers to hear AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, Betty Friedan, Richard Rorty, Cornel West, Eric Foner, and Patricia Williams excoriate the corporate domination of American economic, political, and cultural life. The next day, plenary and workshop sessions featuring leading unionists and intellectuals were filled to capacity. Nine other campuses, from Detroit to Texas, hosted smaller teach-ins, loosely linked to the Columbia event.

Was Columbia a truly historic moment, as some of its organizers claimed? We think it was, insofar as no such fraternal, mass public gathering was even conceivable for the past two political generations—certainly not since the early 1960s, and probably not since 1948. Cultural memory being so weak in America, a relationship between progressive intellectuals and the "working classes," for a century practically a given of American public life, came to seem odd, infeasible, even quaint. Yet almost everyone who attended the Columbia teach-in came away with a sense of possibility, inspired not only by the huge turnout and stirring rhetoric, but by the serious wrestling with complex issues in the standing-room-only workshops. Running like an

electric current through all the proceedings was an acute recognition of the event's social significance, its bringing together two worlds that had been estranged for so long.

Where is this attempt to reconstruct a once fertile alliance headed? In the short run, toward more of the same. Already, teach-ins are planned at the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Washington, with others likely. Because the center of gravity of intellectual life has shifted so heavily to the university since the Age of Roosevelt, teach-ins are an appropriate form through which to mobilize cultural opposition to corporate greed and intimidation. The teach-in combines a more distanced educational purpose with the agitation of a social movement in the making.

Then, too, campuses have become the site of labor struggles involving service workers, clerical employees, graduate teaching assistants, and faculty, perhaps a bellwether of a dawning "labor consciousness" in sectors of the economy and segments of the population thought to be immune to this sort of collectivist mentality. The teach-ins—with the exception of Columbia's—largely took place at schools either with heavily working-class student bodies or unionized faculty or both, like Clinch Valley College, in a mining area of southwest Virginia, Wayne State University in Detroit, and the University of Cincinnati. With attacks on tenure gathering steam, even those in more elite layers of the professoriate may soon find themselves walking the same picket lines as department secretaries and cafeteria workers. Noted Yale historian David

Montgomery announced to a cheering teach-in crowd that he came from "ValuJet University," a reference to his Ivy League employer's effort to undercut campus unions and wages through subcontracting.

Students probably will play a growing role in the teach-ins as they spread. Over the last few years, student labor action coalitions—SLACs—have popped up on a number of campuses, including Wisconsin, Brown, and, in the wake of the teach-in, Columbia. Along with other vehicles of student activism, they have become a breeding ground of future trade union organizers. The AFL-CIO's Union Summer exposed well over a thousand college students to the world of the labor organizer; moreover, it used their presence much in the way (if not nearly to the same extent) that Mississippi Freedom Summer did a generation ago, to make the national media take notice of a world it had grown accustomed to ignoring, the world of the marginalized and exploited and intimidated working poor. There ought to be repeat performances of Union Summer, enlisting new legions of college students and perhaps targeted more strategically at sites likely to ignite widespread indignation and action. At Columbia, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka called for academic supporters to come to the front lines when labor struggles erupt. SLAC members, with energy and e-mail at their disposal, would do well to take up Trumka's suggestion, organizing flying squadrons to back labor struggles on and off the campus. The same networks could rally on behalf of labor legislation, demonstrate against corporate malefactors of great wealth (including those on university boards), and expose how the "labor question" touches the university. Is this the beginning of a new kind of student movement?

Perhaps the time is right to establish a national organization of scholars, writers, and artists for a revitalized and democratic labor movement. In addition to holding more teach-ins, it would provide resources for student groups and for campus labor struggles. It might also sponsor a newsletter, journal, or magazine, even a think tank, in which intellectuals could grapple with the labor question in its broadest sense—not only as a matter of industrial and economic

democracy, but as a social question impinging on everything from race and gender relations to popular culture. Such steps might begin to legitimate labor-oriented research in the academy, where it has been ghettoized in labor studies departments or business schools. And reaching out to the world of arts and letters beyond the confines of the campus holds out the hope, at least, of challenging the corporate domination of commercial culture.

There are obstacles to overcome. Breaking down the walls of the academic ghetto—a post-sixties isolation ward that breeds its own, often exotic forms of social ignorance and self-absorption—will not be easy. Navigating the shoals of labor politics has its dangers, too. The Columbia teach-in grew out of links a handful of academics made with the upper echelon of the new AFL-CIO leadership, bypassing the rivalries among individual unions. Labor speakers at the Columbia teach-in mainly came from a few internationals: UNITE, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, and from the AFL-CIO itself. The glaring absence of the major industrial unions, let alone the building trades, would need to be overcome in creating any broad alliance. Also, some teach-in participants seek stronger ties to rank-and-file groups, whose relationship to the Sweeney regime is ambiguous or hostile.

The startling openness of the new labor leaders in agreeing to facilitate an event they did not control gives hope that desperation and possibility can combine to allow us to overcome the grudges and factionalism that have crippled labor-left politics for many years. Everything in the end depends on the creation of real social motion, and at this writing there are still only slender signs of what we're all looking for. First of all, the new labor leaders must make good on their good intentions. Without successful organizing drives, a more independent political presence, and actions that clearly position the labor movement at the riskier, cutting edge of democratic social change, the momentum of Columbia will be hard to sustain. In the meantime, aside from a teach-in here, a conference there, are we consigned to wait for Godot? Well, maybe yes. But surely there are moments when the sparks can come from the outside. □

Richard Rorty

BACK TO CLASS POLITICS

If you go to Britain and attend a Labour party rally, you will probably hear the audience sing "The Red Flag." That song begins, "The people's flag is deepest red. It's shrouded oft our martyred dead. But ere their limbs grew stiff and cold, Their hearts' blood dyed its every fold."

You may find this song maudlin and melodramatic. But it will remind you of something that many people have forgotten: that the history of the labor unions, in Britain, America, and everywhere else in the world, is a blood-drenched history of violent struggle. Like the civil rights movement, the labor movement owed its successes to repeated and deliberate criminal acts—acts that we now think of as heroic civil disobedience, but which were brutally punished. To obstruct scabs from entering a workplace into which they are invited by the owners of that workplace is a criminal act, just as it is a criminal act to sit in at a lunch counter after the proprietor asks you to leave. The police who brutalized the strikers thought of themselves as preventing criminal acts from taking place, and they were right. But, of course, the strikers were also right when they replied that the police were acting as the agents of employers who refused to give their workers a decent share of the value those workers produced. To persuade the American people to see strikes, and violence against strikers, in this alternative way took a very long time. Only after an enormous amount of suffering, and very gradually, did it become politically impossible for mayors, gov-

ernors, and sheriffs to send in their men to break strikers' skulls. Only in recent years has this strategy once again become politically possible.

We are accustomed to seeing labor leaders photographed with presidents, and officials of General Motors and the United Auto Workers jumping up and shaking hands at the end of a successful bargaining session. So we think of labor unions as fine old American institutions, built into the fabric of the country. We think of strikes as an accepted, and perfectly reasonable, method of bringing about a slightly fairer distribution of profits. But we should remember that the early history of labor unions in America, as in the rest of the world, is a history of the skulls of strikers being broken by truncheons, decade after decade. We should also realize that those truncheons have recently reappeared: as John Sweeney reminds us in his book, during the last few years they have been used on striking janitors in Los Angeles and striking coal miners in Virginia.

We should also remember that the history of the labor movement is one of heroic self-deprivation. Only after a great many striking mothers had seen their children go hungry were the unions able to accumulate enough money to set up strike funds, and to provide a little help. Only because millions of workers refused to become scabs by taking jobs that would have meant food for their families did the strikes eventually succeed. You would never guess, from William Bennett's and Robert Bork's speeches about the need to overcome liberal individualism, that the labor unions provide by far the best examples in America's history of the virtues that these writers claim we must recapture. The history of

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the unions provides the best examples of comradeship, loyalty, and self-sacrifice.

Sometimes American unions have become corrupt, and have been taken over by greedy and cynical crooks. In this respect, their record is no better or worse than that of American churches, American law firms, American business firms, and even American academic departments. But at their best, the labor unions are America at its best. Like the civil rights movement, the union movement is a model of Americans getting together on their own and changing society from the bottom up—forcing it to become more decent, more democratic, and more humane. The strikers who braved the wrath of the police and the National Guard created a moral atmosphere in which no one was willing to be seen crossing a picket line, or be caught wearing clothes that did not bear a union label, or be known to have scabbed. This unwillingness was an expression of the sort of human solidarity that made the year 1989 possible in Eastern Europe, and which made the Founding Fathers willing to risk their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. The fact that people are now once again willing to cross picket lines, and are unwilling to ask themselves who makes their clothes or who picks their vegetables, is a symptom of moral decline.

Most American schoolchildren learn something about the martyrs of the civil rights movement. They at least know how Martin Luther King, Jr. died. Perhaps they have also heard of Medgar Evers or of Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner. But these schoolchildren usually have no idea of how it came about that most American workers have an eight-hour day and a five-day work week. They are unlikely to be taught about the conditions in the sweatshops and factories in which their great-grandparents worked, nor about how the unions made those conditions a little better for their grandparents and parents. They know nothing of the blood that had to be spilled, and the hunger that had to be endured, in order that unions could be transformed from criminal conspiracies into fine old American institutions.

We should help our students understand that

social justice in America has owed much more to civil disobedience than to the use of the ballot. The students need to know that the deepest and most enduring injustices, like the unending humiliation of African-Americans and the miserable wages paid to unorganized workers, are always downplayed by the political parties, and by most of the press. They need to remember that the same argument now used against raising the minimum wage—that doing so will discourage economic efficiency and productivity—was once used against the eight-hour day. They need to be able to spot the resemblances between what the politicians were indirectly and gently bribed to ignore at the beginning of this century and what they are being indirectly and gently bribed to ignore now. They need to realize that the last hundred years of our country's history has witnessed a brutal struggle between the corporations and the workers, that this struggle is still going on, and that the corporations are winning. They need to know that the deepest social problems usually go unmentioned by candidates for political office, because it is not in the interest of the rich to have those problems discussed in public.

Today our country, like the other industrialized democracies, faces a problem that few politicians, except for scurrilous fascists like Pat Buchanan and, in France, Jean-Marie Le Pen, seem willing to talk about: the wages of European and American workers are ridiculously high by world standards. There is less and less need to employ any of these workers, since the same work can be done elsewhere for a fifth of the cost. Furthermore, the globalization of the markets in capital and labor means that no nation's economy is sufficiently self-contained to permit long-term social planning by a national government. So the American economy is passing out of the control of the American government, and thus out of the control of the American voters.

This new situation is fine with the 1 percent of Americans who own 40 percent of their country's wealth. Their dividends typically increase when jobs are exported from Ohio to South China, and from North Carolina to Thailand. The strength of the dollar does not matter to them, because their investment advisers can

flip their money into other currencies at the touch of a button. They have less and less at stake in America's future, and more and more invested in an efficient and productive global economy—an economy made ever more efficient and productive by the constant expansion of the global labor market into poorer and poorer countries. There is little reason to believe that what is good for GM or Microsoft is good for America. The economic royalists whom Franklin Roosevelt denounced still had a lot invested in America's future. For today's super-rich, such an investment would be imprudent.

There is much too little public discussion of the changes that this globalized labor market will inevitably bring to America in the coming decades. Bill Bradley is one of the few prominent politicians to have insisted that we must prevent our country from breaking up into hereditary economic castes. Writers like Michael Lind and Edward Luttwak are sketching very plausible scenarios of an America in which the top fifth of the country, the well-educated professionals, carry out the orders of the international super-rich. These people will get paid between \$75,000 and \$500,000 a year to do so. The remaining four-fifths of the country, the four-fifths that now has a median family income of \$30,000, will get a little less in every successive year, and will keep on doing all the dirty work. America, the country that was to have witnessed a new birth of freedom, will gradually be divided by class differences of a sort that would have been utterly inconceivable to Jefferson, or to Lincoln, or to Walt Whitman.

Unless the politicians begin to talk about long-term social planning, Lind and Luttwak argue, economic inequality, and the formation of hereditary economic castes, will continue unchecked. Maybe these authors are too pessimistic, but we shall never know unless the questions they pose are taken up by candidates for public office. The most important single reason for hoping that American labor unions will become much bigger and more powerful than they are now is that they are the only organizations who want to get these questions on the table—to force politicians to talk about what is going to happen to wages, and how we are going to avoid increasing eco-

nomic injustice. If a revived union movement could get out the vote in the old mill towns, in the rural slums, and in the inner cities, instead of letting the suburban vote set the national political agenda, those questions *would* be on the table.

The whole point of America was that it was going to be the world's first classless society. It was going to be a place where janitors, executives, professors, nurses, and salesclerks would look each other in the eye, and respect each other as fellow citizens. It was going to be a place where their kids all went to the same schools, and where they got the same treatment from the police and the courts. From the days of Franklin Roosevelt to those of Lyndon Johnson, we made enormous progress toward the creation of such a society. In the twenty years between World War II and Vietnam the newly respectable labor unions made their presence felt on the national scene, and accomplished a great deal. Those were the years in which academics like Daniel Bell, Arthur Schlesinger, and John Kenneth Galbraith worked side by side with labor leaders like Walter Reuther and A. Philip Randolph.

The Vietnam War saw the end of the traditional alliance between the academics and the unions—an alliance that had nudged the Democratic party steadily to the left during the previous twenty years. We are still living with the consequences of the anti-Vietnam War movement, and in particular with those of the rage of the increasingly manic student protesters of the late 1960s. These protesters were absolutely right that Vietnam was an unjust war, a massacre of which our country should always be ashamed. But when the students began to burn flags, and to spit at returning soldiers, they did deeper and more long-lasting damage to the American left than they could ever have imagined. When they began to spell "America" with a "k," they lost the respect and the sympathy of the union members. Until George McGovern's defeat in 1972, the New Left did not realize that it had unthinkingly destroyed an alliance that had been central to American leftist politics.

Since those days, leftists in the colleges and

universities have concentrated their energies on academic politics rather than on national politics. As Todd Gitlin put it, we academics marched on the English department while the Republicans took over the White House. While we had our backs turned, the labor unions were being steadily ground down by the shift to a service economy, and by the machinations of the Reagan and Bush administrations. The best thing that could happen to the American left would be for the academics to get back into the class struggle, and for the labor union members to forgive and forget the stupid and self-defeating anti-American rhetoric that filled the universities of the late sixties.

This is not to say that those twenty-five years of inward-looking academic politics were in vain. American campuses are very much better places—*morally* better places—than they were in 1970. Thanks to all those marches on the En-

glish department, and various other departments, the situation of women, gays and lesbians, African-Americans, and Hispanics has been enormously improved. Their new role in the academy is helping improve their situation in the rest of American society.

Nevertheless, leftist academic politics has run its course. It is time to revive the kind of leftist politics that pervaded American campuses from the Great Depression through the early sixties—a politics that centers on the struggle to prevent the rich from ripping off the rest of the country. If the unions will help us revive this kind of politics, maybe the academy and the labor movement can get together again. Maybe together we can help bring our country closer to the goal that matters most: the classless society. That is the cause for which the AFL-CIO organizers are now fighting, and for which some of their predecessors died. □

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John J. Sweeney

TIME FOR A NEW CONTRACT

I am a product of the social compact that lifted America out of the Great Depression and working Americans into the middle class. My father was an Irish immigrant, a New York City bus driver, and a proud member of the Transport Workers Union. He lived and worked in tough times. But working people, business people, and public officials shared certain understandings.

Here's what working people knew: if we got up every morning and did our jobs, then we could earn a better life for ourselves and a better chance for our children. Here's what business people knew: if they paid their workers fairly and plowed some of their profits back into their communities, they could count on loyal employees and loyal consumers. And here's what our leaders in government understood—and President Kennedy said it best: "A rising tide lifts all boats."

For almost thirty years after World War II, we all prospered because we prospered together. We were concerned with raising the standard of living for all Americans—not just accumulating money for a fortunate few. Our social compact was a formula for the strongest economy, the largest middle class, and the most successful society this world has ever known.

But now, those days are gone. Faced with deregulation, the oil embargo, and the emergence of new technologies, corporations made a fateful decision to compete in the new

global economy, not by American teamwork and American know-how, but by driving down labor costs.

That is why, from 1978 through 1995, the buying power of workers' hourly earnings fell by 12 percent. American families tried to cope. They sent husbands, wives, and teenagers into the labor force. They took second and third jobs. They went deeper into debt. But, in spite of it all, median family income fell 5 percent between 1989 and 1994.

Meanwhile, the wealthiest Americans are doing better than ever. Between 1980 and 1995, the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 404 percent. That provided huge payoffs for investors—but no wage gains for workers. Corporate profits have risen 205 percent since 1980. Corporate chief executive officers are raking in 360 percent more—and now they earn 187 times more than the average worker.

And now, instead of merely depressing wages, profitable corporations are wiping out jobs. The stories are all too familiar. Mobil Oil announces big layoffs and its stock goes up. Chase Manhattan and Chemical Bank announce a merger that puts 12,000 people out of work and *their* stock goes up. AT&T says it plans to lay off 40,000 men and women and its stock goes up.

What's wrong with this picture? Two years ago, workers at five Bridgestone/Firestone tire plants [Bridgestone/Firestone is a subsidiary of the Bridgestone Corporation of Japan] in the United States decide to exercise their legal right to strike. Instead of treating their employees with respect as they

This piece is excerpted from a speech given at the Columbia University Teach-In with the Labor Movement on October 3, 1996.

do in Japan, the company fires two thousand men and women, the biggest illegal replacement of workers in our country's history! Our secretary of labor asks to meet with the CEO and gets turned down! In Japan, public opinion would force the CEO to resign for such shameful acts; here in the United States it's business as usual.

And how about this picture? Three years ago, the citizens of Solway, New York, were delighted when Landis Plastics decided to open a new plant in their job-starved little community. Now Landis has shown itself to be an employer devoid of any sense of corporate responsibility, a company that gives demerits to workers who have to take their children to emergency rooms, discriminates between men and women in pay scales and job assignments, fires workers for trying to organize a union, cancels health insurance coverage for disabled workers, and runs a plant that is lopping off fingers in pursuit of extra profits.

For American workers and their families, these are snapshots from hell. They paint an ugly portrait of a country that has lost respect for workers and the jobs they do. American workers are running out of money, running out of options, and running out of hope. They've exhausted their savings and they are loaded with debt. They are frustrated and bitter, and their anger is exceeded only by anxiety over keeping their jobs. They see the stock market soaring and profits roaring and they wonder, "Who the hell is getting my share?"

Because of the wage and the wealth gap, America is becoming edgier, angrier, and meaner. Until we ease the growing gaps in work, wages, and wealth, we will be reading more dispatches from a wounded nation—more militia movements, more bombings, more hate crimes, and more of the quiet anguish of Americans losing their sense of a common destiny and a common purpose. America will become more like the trouble spots where we send our sons and daughters to keep peace.

So what can we do about it? Of course, American business must change and Ameri-

can government must change. But American labor must also change. That is why I ran for president of the AFL-CIO, and that is why I won. Here's the truth: the weakness of labor encouraged employers to take the low road. And only by rebuilding our strength can we bring American business back to the high road of high wages. That is why I am challenging every union to put millions of dollars into organizing from the Sunbelt to the Rustbelt and from health care to high tech. That is why we are pouring money and people into rebuilding our grassroots political strength.

"More." That's what Samuel Gompers said when he was asked nearly a century ago, "What does labor want?" Many of you know his words well. "More schoolhouses and less jails," he said, "more books and less arsenals, more learning and less vice, more constant work and less crime, more leisure and less greed, more justice and less revenge." It was an eloquent statement of values trade unionists still hold dear. And what do working Americans want as we draw close to a new century? What we want is to work together to build an America that holds true to the values we honor in our homes and in our houses of worship.

We want to live in a country where you can raise a family without having to hold down three jobs to do it. Where you don't have to spend so much time at work that you have no time left to go to a movie or a ball game with your kids or grandchildren. Where your lot in life is determined by what you do, and not by the color of your skin or the accident of your birth. Where our children and grandchildren can look forward to pay raises instead of layoff notices; to going to college instead of into a dead-end job; to enjoying life more, not less, than we've been able to.

Our idea of a just society is one in which honest labor raises the standard of living for all, rather than one with enormous wealth for a few. And our notion of a moral nation is one that cares for its young, its old, and its poor—and leaves the rich to fend for themselves. □

Roger Waldinger, Chris Erickson, Ruth Milkman, Daniel J.B. Mitchell, Abel Valenzuela, Kent Wong, and Maurice Zeitlin

JUSTICE FOR JANITORS

Organizing in Difficult Times

On June 15, 1990, the Los Angeles police attacked a peaceful demonstration of janitors and their supporters in the tony Century City district of Los Angeles. Local 399 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) was seeking a union contract for the workers who clean the huge, glittering office towers that dominate this part of the city. The SEIU's "Justice for Janitors" (J4J) campaign had been underway in L.A. for about two years, and this was one of many such demonstrations that had been held during that period.

The police attack left several people seriously wounded and caused a pregnant woman to miscarry. Although organizers initially feared that the violence might put an end to their effort, it proved a turning point in the campaign to unionize L.A.'s janitors, most of them immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Widespread outrage at the police action, both locally and around the country, led International Service Systems (ISS), the cleaning contractor for nearly all the Century City buildings, to sign a union contract soon afterward, in the largest private-sector organizing success among Latino immigrants since the United Farm Workers' victories nearly two decades earlier.

Southern California hardly seemed a likely setting for this drama. With the decline of heavy

industry in the region, organized labor had lost legions of well-paid, blue-collar members in the 1970s and 1980s. Meanwhile, a new world of labor had emerged in L.A.: a burgeoning immigrant population employed in low-skilled, low-paying manufacturing and service jobs. For a while, it seemed that this new labor force would be extremely docile: as long as the newcomers compared a minimum-wage job in the garment center to an unyielding plot of land in Mexico's central plateau, employers could count on their workers' quiescence.

But the tide has been turning, with militant union activity suggesting that the days of immigrant servitude are over. Emblematic of this shift is the J4J campaign, which successfully re-organized the building services industry, bringing more than eight thousand largely immigrant workers under a union contract.

Janitorial unionism took hold in L.A. just after World War II. By the mid-1970s, nearly all the large downtown buildings were under union contract, as well as most of the large buildings in Hollywood, Pasadena, and Santa Monica.

The 1970s were the union's heyday, with membership peaking at about five thousand in 1978. But as Richard Mines and Jeffrey Avina note in a study of California's janitors published in 1992, "Neither the union leadership nor its militant labor force . . . [was] entirely satisfied with the job conditions that prevailed in 1975. Wages had more than doubled from those available a decade before, but still were only \$3.75 an hour."¹

The local pushed hard for further improvements. Between 1976 and 1983, union wages rose an average of fifty cents a year. Unionized

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contractors ultimately provided a benefit package that included eleven paid holidays and full medical, dental, vision, and prescription coverage. By 1982, total compensation in the union sector had risen above \$12 an hour, as opposed to \$4 an hour in the nonunion buildings.

But then the bottom fell out. The local's push to improve conditions and compensation motivated cleaning contractors to explore nonunion options, and by 1983, as Mines and Avina recount, "a small group of mid-sized, aggressive firms sensed the union's vulnerability and made their move." The new, nonunion entities proved to be formidable competitors. By 1985, janitorial union membership had fallen to 1,800. And with the union all but broken, wages plummeted.

Enter the Immigrants

Scratch a low-paid service worker, find an immigrant—so it goes in the caste society that is late twentieth-century L.A. But southern California once looked different—and not so long ago. In 1970, service work was still largely the province of the region's African-American population. African-Americans made up 33 percent of the region's janitors, whereas Latino immigrants were a small presence, barely 7 percent.* But in the 1980s, immigrants were moving into southern California, and it was they who would supply the workforce for the emerging nonunion cleaning contractors. Like immigrants everywhere, newcomers to L.A. gravitated to the jobs where their kin and hometown friends were employed. By 1970, there was already a significant Latino presence among the city's janitors. But even without initial contacts, the expanding janitorial occupation was an easy port of entry for immigrants with little formal education, in part due to its casual hiring practices.

The job had an additional attraction, namely the relative security it offered for undocumented immigrants fearful of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Since janitors work in small numbers, at night, and in buildings likely to be locked up after business hours, the industry was an inconvenient target for the INS; far

better a single day's raid on a factory with two hundred workers than a series of nights spent on sweeps of scattered buildings.

As wages fell and the union's power waned, blacks moved out of the occupation. Increased turnover accelerated the African-American exodus. "It wasn't that [employers] would actually fire the blacks; [but] with attrition, the replacement pool was Latinos," one organizer told us.

"The nonunion firms almost exclusively hired Latinos," explained a union organizer. That immigrants would work for lower wages was only part of the motivation to recruit them: "I think 'cheap' was less of a question [than] 'controllable.'" By virtue of its past history, Local 399 was ill-equipped to respond to the influx of a new type of worker. "The union had done a good job of being representative of membership and had black reps. Then the industry switched to Latino workers and disconnected the workforce from the union, because the union couldn't fire its reps the way management could change its workforce."

By 1990, the face of janitorial work in L.A. had been utterly transformed. Spurred by the building boom of the 1980s, the industry grew quickly, employing 28,883 janitors by 1990, more than twice as many as in 1980. Almost all of the new jobs went to Latino immigrants, whose share of employment rose from 28 to 61 percent.

In this situation, there were many obstacles to union organizing. In building services, as in so many other immigrant-employing industries, recruiting through informal personal contacts served both to attract labor and to keep it under control. Frontline supervisors often oversaw their relatives. Regardless of ties to relatives, the ethnic mix often proved combustible, as Central Americans and Mexicans did not always perceive the affinity that labor solidarity would prescribe. "I've been into buildings where the Salvadorans and the Mexicanos don't like each other," explained one experienced, Mexican-born union organizer, "and they hate and they are separate and they eat separate."

The immigrant influx coincided with Local 399's troubles, but it would be misleading to suggest that it caused them. The building services industry recruited immigrants in virtually

*See Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

every city where they were to be found, but with widely varying consequences. In New York, for example, immigrants make up 60 percent of the building service workforce, but earn \$7,000 more than their counterparts in L.A., and New York never experienced the deunionization of janitors that L.A. suffered in the 1980s. Closer to home, San Francisco also saw an immigrant infusion, but wages and union membership did not take the battering they did in L.A.

The Union Returns to Town

While Local 399 was crashing, its parent was taking on a new form. The SEIU had grown during the 1960s and 1970s, largely through diversification into health care and the public sector. But the regime of John J. Sweeney, which began in 1980, transformed the organization. Sweeney doubled union dues, historically the lowest in the AFL-CIO, and increased the national staff from twenty to more than two hundred between 1984 and 1988. The new staff members were recruited from the ranks of the not-so-new left; since few unions were hiring staff during the 1980s, the SEIU “had its pick of these ‘new’ labor militants,” in Michael Piore’s view. These changes were part of a new strategy, one that Piore characterizes as follows:

The planning process the SEIU has instituted involves considerable staff and leadership training. And another distinguishing characteristic of the SEIU [has] been its willingness to invest in this training. Ironically . . . the union has contracted with the American Management Association to provide it . . . It is an integrated structure, self-consciously devised and instituted by Sweeney and his staff. The ideas that underlie it were drawn from the business management literature. The staff read widely in the business press and the more scholarly literature as well. Their single most important source was probably the *Harvard Business Review*.²

The institutional changes made the SEIU a more sophisticated and more militant union, and infused it with some of the spirit of the old CIO.

But it was not until the mid-1980s that the SEIU focused its efforts on its traditional home base—building services. Though the founding locals (Chicago, New York, and San Francisco) were still holding fast, the rest of the building

services division was in deep trouble, losing ground to nonunion competitors and getting battered by unionized employers in search of concessions. What is now a set of campaign practices known as “Justice for Janitors” emerged gradually. The name emerged in a “fight back” struggle in Pittsburgh, in which the SEIU defeated employer efforts to wring concessions with the “in-your-face, confrontational militant direct action” that has since become J4J’s trademark. The same tactics were used again shortly afterward in Denver, where the union raised “enough hell in the downtown area that the industry caved.”

J4J arrived in southern California in 1988, but not without trepidation, if only because “It was really huge . . . going from little Denver to monstrous L.A. was like, ‘are we ready for this?’ ” The campaign began in the downtown area, taking responsibility both for representing the remaining union base and for organizing the nonunion buildings nearby. The plan involved targeting the nonunion wings of “double-breasted” companies (firms with both union and nonunion operations under different names) and taking advantage of competition in the industry by letting the unionized companies pick up work at low rates, with the understanding that they would move to union standards once half of the market had been organized.

One of J4J’s first targets in L.A. was Century Cleaning, a small local contractor with union and nonunion wings. In some respects, the campaign proceeded along traditional lines: contacting workers, making house calls, identifying leaders in both the union and nonunion buildings. In other ways, the game plan was different. Most important, there was no expectation that the drive would result in an election. As one union organizer explained: “We can have an election with cleaning contractors, [but] the building owner has a right to change cleaning contractors at any time. And you can’t file an unfair labor practices complaint against the building owner, since he’s not the employer.”

The union soon learned that “it didn’t take a contract to redefine the relationship with the company.” By filing complaints with agencies responsible for protecting workers, such as the California Occupational Safety and Health Ad-

ministration and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), J4J pressured the employer—and proved to workers that the union could intervene on their behalf even without a contract.

In the end, the battle took Century's owner "out of the fight," with the union redefining victory as "the owner bouncing Century Cleaning from the building"—a claim that was not entirely hollow, since some of Century's contracts were won by union firms.

In the summer of 1989, the campaign's focus shifted to Century City, a large west side office complex. Of the 400 janitors working there, 250 were employed by a single cleaning contractor, ISS. This proved a big advantage. "One victory in downtown meant one building; whereas in Century City, if we can get one owner to go union, we're going to take the whole thing," an organizer explained. "But also it meant they had a lot more investment in fighting us. So it was a knock-down drag-out battle."

J4J marshaled a variety of tactics to put pressure on ISS. For example, knowing that ISS was an international company based in Denmark, the union arranged for a visiting delegation of Danish trade unionists to meet workers involved in the organizing effort, and to witness firsthand the hostility of the employer. "We couldn't have paid for a better experience than for these guys to go back home and meet with the head of the ISS and say, 'I don't know what you think you're doing in the U.S., but we don't like it,'" an organizer recalled. "The whole thing is to get the people with power to feel the pressure." J4J also staged various "in-your-face" publicity stunts to draw the attention of Century City building tenants to the janitors' plight; tenants often complained to building managers about J4J activities, indirectly intensifying the pressure on ISS.

Other tactics took a different approach to win public sympathy.

I remember we did a Secretaries' Day demonstration where we brought huge boxes of carnations, thousands of them, and we passed them out as a sort of token of appreciation from janitors to secretaries. We said, "There's been five demonstrations, it's probably very difficult for you, but we ask for your support as we fight for our rights." And it turned out to have a positive impact.

By late spring, 1990, the union concluded

that employer intransigence left it no alternative but to strike—and that it had the strength to take on that challenge. On May 29, 1990, "we pulled the buildings." From that point on, the pace of activity escalated sharply:

We had daily actions, every morning we walked along the median strip with human billboards, traffic was really tied up. And on some days we had big actions. On the first big one, we stormed through every single building in Century City, every single one. We had a lot of community people, it was about three or four hundred people. We went marching through the buildings, chanting and banging on drums, saying, "What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!" Pretty simple, straightforward things . . . The L.A.P.D. called a citywide tactical alert that day. They just completely freaked out. They were getting panicked calls from every building in Century City, which was the power center of the west side, and in some ways the power center of the city.

This set the stage for the events of June 15, when the L.A. police attacked a peaceful march of J4J strikers and supporters as they walked from Beverly Hills to Century City. In full view of the media, the police charged the crowd, injuring many, including children and pregnant women. Organizers feared that workers would be intimidated, but at a strikers' meeting shortly after the event, it became clear that the attack had only strengthened workers' resolve. "It was like, 'Let's go back on Monday. Put the word out, we're going back on Monday, and we're going to be bigger, we're going to be badder! You can't scare us out of Century City.' This was not the organizers' message to the workers, this was the workers' message to the union."

Public outrage added fuel to the campaign. Mayor Tom Bradley came under pressure to act. And in New York, after seeing a video of the L.A. police beating strikers, Gus Bevona, the powerful president of SEIU Local 32B-32J, previously unwilling to exert any pressure on ISS, was moved to lend a hand.

Bevona called the president of ISS into his office, and after making him wait in the front office for two and a half hours, threatened that if he didn't recognize the L.A. union, "all hell would break loose." The contract with ISS was

signed that day.

Bringing ISS to the table involved the expenditure of a great deal of political capital. As one Local 399 official told us, "People are always calling him [Bevona] up saying, 'I can't solve my own problem, you solve it for me.' He's a powerful guy in New York, but there is just so much he can do." In this case, successful mobilization in L.A. created the context in which Bevona was moved to cash in his chips. And without that mobilization, pressure from afar would not have had much impact.

Gus Bevona could have done this earlier. But if we weren't in a position to hang on to our membership, if the building owners said, "We don't care what Gus Bevona says, you're out of here," there's not much that Gus Bevona can do about real estate developers in L.A. . . . Unless we're in a position where we can use that help it would have been a meaningful gesture on his part.

In any case, with ISS brought to its knees, J4J won the battle for Century City, and this in turn paved the way for other successes in L.A.

The Ingredients of Success

We can identify three key ingredients in J4J's dramatic success in L.A.: centralized union leadership; an industry-specific strategy; and a critical mass of class-conscious immigrant workers. The first two elements are typical of J4J nationwide, and indeed the campaign also succeeded in some cities where immigrants were not present in large numbers. However, J4J's spectacular showing in L.A. was due to a special dynamic created by the presence of large numbers of immigrants from Central America and Mexico in its janitorial labor force.

- **Centralization:** J4J is widely seen as a bottom-up campaign. That it is, but it also has a crucial top-down component. In part, the importance of centralization comes down to a matter of dollars and cents. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that 25 percent of SEIU's budget goes to organizing, as opposed to an average of 5 percent for the rest of organized labor, and the J4J campaign indicates why. The campaign is labor-intensive, requiring substantial personnel. And the high-visibility tactics are also high-risk tactics, especially when the union runs up against owners or

developers with deep pockets.

Moreover, local leadership has been less than enthusiastic; effective organization has often meant taking matters out of local leaders' hands. "The leadership in 1987 was old school, conservative," reflected one of the lead J4J organizers. "There was concern that they would bail when things got hot." In early 1989, the L.A. local put a halt to its material support for the campaign, and if the International had not intervened it is unlikely that janitorial unionism in L.A. would have developed as it has.

Nor is L.A. unique in this regard. J4J has frequently been exported through trusteeships, which were imposed on the San Diego, Atlanta, San Jose, and Santa Clara locals. One seasoned union source reported that local staff and leaders were frequently resistant to the J4J model, and often threw up roadblocks to organizing. It is not difficult to imagine why an incumbent leadership will opt for the status quo, especially in light of the political ramifications of a sudden infusion of new, possibly ethnically distinctive, members.

Thus a centralized structure that allowed the International to bypass local decision-makers was a necessary condition of J4J's success. But it was not a sufficient condition: the resources that the International devoted to organizing could have been misspent.

- **Strategy and Tactics:** J4J's basic strategy is to seek control over all the key players in a local labor market, with the goal of taking labor costs out of competition. "One industry, one union, one contract" is the slogan on a union leaflet. J4J seeks to compel employers "to fight *on our terms*, not theirs," as Stephen Lerner, former director of Building Service Organizing for the SEIU and the architect of the strategy, has described the basic plan.

J4J deliberately abandoned the traditional NLRB election approach to organizing, in part because of the peculiar structure of this industry. Instead, J4J developed the idea of a "comprehensive campaign"—in the words of a key organizer, "a war against the employers *and* the building owners, waged on all fronts [without] leaving any stone unturned." The war-plan had several key elements.

- (1) **Intelligence:** Along with its 1930s-style

spirit, J4J has brought 1990s-style techniques to the cause of janitorial unionism; indeed, the union's strategy began with a business-oriented understanding of the industry. From its inception, the L.A. campaign "had a full-time research/corporate person," whose information was supplemented by data supplied by researchers at SEIU headquarters in Washington. As one impressed management informant put it, SEIU had the ability to "ferret out the weaknesses" of the ownership/management structure in any particular situation.

Such intelligence also plays a role in motivating the membership. "Our economists know how to crunch the numbers. Someone will get pissed if they learn that it costs the owner one cent to give them a raise." Understanding the industry also becomes a tool in the hands of the workers, allowing them to see that they have the potential to turn things around.

(2) **Guerrilla legal tactics:** While abandoning the election route, J4J found legal protections that could be used to gain leverage over employers. For example, J4J filed complaints with the NLRB over unfair labor practices such as discrimination against union activists. This approach also permitted janitors to go on strike under certain conditions with legal protection against being permanently replaced.

Use of such guerrilla tactics served two ends. First, as one management informant told us, they "beat down the contractors economically;" those unprepared to "spend a fortune on lawyers . . . settled pretty quickly." Second, guerrilla tactics transformed the union into the de facto representative of the workers. "An extra weapon was being used against the company," a key organizer recalled. "We called it 'acting union without a union contract.' That was what we tried to do with the workers of the nonunion companies. It didn't require a contract for them to redefine their relationship to their employer and to defend their rights."

The legal prohibition against secondary boycotts means that "in-your-face" activities must be handled gingerly. SEIU has generally been successful in walking the fine line distinguishing acts of free speech protected by the First Amendment from those activities that would trigger Board action to protect such "innocent"

parties as building owners. "The law prevents us from picketing against the building owner," one organizer recalled, "so we made a snowman with a picket sign."

(3) **Coalition-building:** The campaign also targeted owners in the political realm. Of particular good fortune for J4J was the fact that it began in the halcyon days of the 1980s, when investors were falling over themselves to build property in downtown L.A. Since construction could not begin without approval from the city's Community Redevelopment Authority (CRA), the union had a powerful lever. During most of the 1980s, the head of the L.A. County AFL-CIO sat on the CRA's board; consequently, no office tower built after 1987 opened up without a unionized cleaning crew.

Another source of pressure involved identifying a key source of capital with both the motivation and the means to exert pressure on developers and owners. Institutions such as banks, insurance companies, and pension funds often found themselves vulnerable to the leverage J4J learned to apply.

The J4J campaign also reached out to organizations in the immigrant community. One observer reported that "a group of community activists became so attracted to the J4J cause, they formed a totally independent group," which ran its own meetings, did its own fundraising, and conducted its own activities to help janitors.

The importance of community involvement, however, should not be overstated. The workers with whom we spoke had only a vague notion of who, if anyone, from "the community" was providing help. Some of the friends of J4J turned out to be the usual suspects, namely students from U.C.L.A. and other schools. Organizers described community involvement in morale-boosting, not strategic terms.

The union seemed to benefit more from its ability to connect with local political leaders. It was not a matter of ending the marriage between L.A.'s political establishment and real estate interests, but of altering it so the deals that political leaders cut with property owners would occasionally yield dividends for someone else.

Another important source of strength was support from unions representing janitors in other cities. When janitorial unionism declined in L.A.,

it remained strong in such traditional citadels as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. Most of the key players on the industry side are attached to nationally or internationally operated firms that do business with the union where they must, and such firms are vulnerable to pressure from their unionized employees. But as we have already noted, SEIU has a tradition of decentralization, and negotiations still occur at the local, not the national level, leaving solidaristic actions subject to local considerations. The story of Gus Bevona's role in securing a contract with ISS is revealing on this score; only when mobilization had reached a boiling point was he willing to intervene.

(4) Mobilizing the rank and file: Ultimately, the ability to pressure employers came from the union's success at inspiring the rank and file to action in ways that generated legal charges, caught the attention of the mass media, and forced the hands of other actors, including politicians and such SEIU leaders as Bevona. As one of our informants emphasized:

The reason that L.A. is the shining star of the union is that we've had the highest percentage of workers' participation, have the highest worker turnout, and the highest percentage of workers going to jail and getting arrested.

This brings us to the third and final ingredient in J4J's L.A. success: the role of immigrants.

The Immigrants

In the period of Local 399's earlier decline, employers had used the social structures of immigration to evade the union and secure a more compliant labor force. But the same structures could be put to a different purpose. The convergence of ethnicity, residence, and occupational concentration made the union's task easier. An organizer recalled, "I would go to a building in Pico Union looking for someone from Premier [a cleaning contractor] and someone would say, 'Oh, she's downstairs—with someone else from Premier.'"

Moreover, the peculiar conditions of building service work created a sense of occupational community: working at night, the janitors formed a somewhat isolated group. Thus, "even though L.A. is famous for no community . . . we found

a community of janitors." Other common experiences seem to have made that community particularly organizable. One organizer reported a "high level of class consciousness," apparently rooted in the societies from which the immigrants came:

One of the good things about organizing Latino workers is that there is a positive view of unions. They know what they are. There is a saying that is much more common there: "*La union hace la fuerza.*" Everyone knows it. If you ask, "*Que piensa de la union?*" they answer, "*La union hace la fuerza.* If the rest of the people want to be in the union, I want to be in it."

Among the Central Americans there was also a component of seasoned activists with a background in left-wing or union activity back home. That experience did more than impart organizing skills; it also put the risks entailed in an union drive in a totally different light:

With the Salvadorans, you find different attitudes. Sometimes you found people who fought there. And there, you were in a union they killed you. Here, you [were in a union] and you lost a job at \$4.25.

The janitorial workforce included both former activists and their old enemies—"You find other ones, 'I was the one who killed that trade unionist.' " But the organizers reported that "no matter what their political background in their country, here they were working class and understood the idea of sticking to your class."

And if one can generalize from the experience of one rank-and-file leader—who described herself as having "learned in the university of daily life and gained a diploma in exploitation"—the bitter experience of settlement in the United States may have added to the union's appeal.

There is other evidence to suggest that Latino immigrant workers are demonstrating a new militance and commitment to labor. Notable examples include a spontaneous, successful walk-out by eight hundred Latino workers at a wheel factory and a similarly self-organized strike throughout Southern California by immigrant drywallers (see David Brody, "Criminalizing the Rights of Labor," *Dissent*, Summer 1995). But although the J4J campaign has done well in cities where immigrants predominate—such as San Jose, Denver and San Diego—it has also scored

success in Milwaukee, where the workforce is almost all African-American.

Defeat Out of Victory?

In the aftermath of J4J's successes in the early 1990s, unrest has moved from the streets into Local 399 itself. The local union leadership, made up of people highly supportive of the J4J effort, was turned out of office in the spring of 1995. The International SEIU responded by placing the local in trusteeship. This turn of events raises the possibility that Local 399's future may not be as bright as its recent past.

A pessimistic view would suggest that the union's hold on the industry is precarious, and that the earlier collapse of Local 399 may be recapitulated in the future. Notwithstanding the gains generated by unionization, wages remain very modest, too low to cement attachment to the industry, which means that the workforce will continue to turn over at high rates. Turnover is an inherent source of union weakness, requiring the local to continually reorganize the workforce, lest the contractors supplant union members with nonunion workers and then go nonunion before anyone is the wiser. Some employers claim that if they pay workers union rates, they can make any given workplace nonunion and that the "union will never know." Although this may be largely bravado, the union's internal preoccupations would suggest that it may be more than an idle threat.

Moreover, there may be less to today's pacific relations with employers than meets the eye: since wage increases in the five-year contract signed in 1995 are back-loaded, employers may grow restive when faced with the thirty-cent-an-hour raise due in 1999. As some of the nonunion contractors have not yet been brought to heel, even a marginal decline in Local 399's strength might swing the balance of power back to the nonunion side.

The possibility that employers might turn more obstreperous has much to do with the currently depressed state of the real estate market; and a revival of demand for office space in L.A. may well bode ill for janitorial unionism. Owners differ in their degree of exposure to the types of pressure that J4J can apply; for the past ten years, J4J has had the good fortune of confronting institutional investors who find themselves highly vulnerable to the tactics that it deploys. Moreover, bad times make all owners concerned about occupancy: they may be more likely to succumb to union pressure when tenants are scarce and difficult to replace. But if and when good times return to L.A., institutional investors may sell out to hard-nosed owners who are less concerned with their public image and less fearful of losing tenants who will, in turn, have fewer options.

But there is also an optimistic interpretation of today's internal travails. In this view, the union's current problems are a normal, perhaps even inevitable result of such a massive organizing effort. As in other similarly competitive industries, unionized employers have been quick to find virtue in a union that can take wages out of competition; as long as it does so, they may be quite willing to bid nonunion times goodbye. Stable relations are aided by the presence of the large national, even international contractors, who live with unions wherever they must, and who have accommodated to janitorial unionism's return to L.A. Although it is true that workers in an industry like building services have to be continually reorganized, this was always true in labor-intensive, small-establishment industries like restaurants, garments, and construction. For much for the twentieth century, these were environments in which unions thrived. And as the pessimist would never have predicted the very considerable success that J4J has achieved so far, we suspect that one would do better to listen to what the optimist has to say. □

Notes

¹ Richard Mines and Jeffrey Avina, "Immigrants and Labor Standards: The Case of California Janitors," in Jorge A. Bustamante, Clark Reynolds, and Raul Hinojosa Ojeda (eds.), *U.S.-Mexico Relations: Labor Market Interdependence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992),

pp.429-48.

² Michael J. Piore, "Unions: A Reorientation to Survive," in Clark Kerr and Paul D. Staudohar (eds.), *Labor Economics and Industrial Relations* (Harvard University Press, 1993), pp.512-41.

ANOTHER LOOK AT NAFTA

“Weak,” “toothless,” “worthless” and “a farce”—these were some of the epithets applied to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) labor side accord negotiated by the United States, Mexico, and Canada in 1993. Trade unionists and labor rights supporters were upset, first by the text of the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) when it appeared, then by early experiences after it went into effect on January 1, 1994. But those wanting progress on labor rights and standards in international trade should be careful of making some idealized “best” the enemy of the good.

The Text

When the side accord was completed in mid-1993, critics cited three main problems with the text. First, it did not create common norms for the three countries. Instead, the negotiators preserved national sovereignty in the formulation of labor laws and the setting of standards, making “effective enforcement” of domestic law the focus of the accord. What good is an agreement, said critics, that leaves weak laws and standards in place instead of pulling them up to higher, harmonized levels?

The second major criticism involved the bureaucracy, procedural maze, and seeming cross-purposes built into the agreement. NAALC creates separate domestic agencies in each country’s Labor Department, called the National Administrative Offices (NAO), which are responsible for a first review of labor law matters in *another* country. This means that complainants must turn to another government,

often in another language, to raise their concerns.

The agreement sets up a council of ministers and a permanent, trilateral secretariat that together make up a “Commission for Labor Cooperation.” The secretariat conducts research and reporting on comparative labor law and labor market issues and staffs *ad hoc* advisory groups, evaluation committees, and arbitration panels composed of nongovernmental experts from each of the countries.

Each of these bodies has complicated jurisdictional reach, and among them they combine various research, reporting, reviewing, consulting, advising, and decision making powers. Timetables for different levels of review, consultations, evaluations, and arbitrations make for a minimum of several months, and as much as two to three years, before procedures could be exhausted.

The side agreement also called for a broad program of cooperative activities on labor law and labor market matters among governments. Critics said this feature might make governments reluctant to question or criticize each other’s law enforcement under the agreement’s review, evaluation, and dispute resolution mechanisms.

The third objection addressed the division of NAALC’s eleven “Labor Principles”—basic labor rights to which the governments commit themselves in making the deal—into three categories or tiers of treatment. The first tier involves so-called “industrial relations” subjects covered by the first three labor principles: (1) freedom of association and the right to organize, (2) the right to bargain collectively, and (3) the right to strike. Though they lie at the

heart of international labor rights, these issues get the lowest level of treatment under the NAALC—the first-level “review” process, with optional ministerial consultations.

Eight labor principles covering prohibition of forced labor, nondiscrimination, equal pay for men and women, workers’ compensation, migrant labor protection, child labor, minimum wage, and occupational safety and health issues can proceed from review to evaluation. Only the last three of these are susceptible to the full range of treatment that includes review, evaluation, and arbitration, with possible application of sanctions in cases of a “persistent pattern of failure to effectively enforce” laws in those areas. Critics argued that narrowing the funnel as issues move forward only chokes off possibilities for enhancing labor rights in North America.

Since it took effect at the beginning of 1994, six cases have been treated under the NAALC. Four involved alleged interference with independent union organizing at Mexican maquiladora factories, one concerned union members’ rights in a Mexican government ministry, and one dealt with a shutdown by Sprint of a California facility in the midst of a union organizing campaign. These cases left labor rights advocates frustrated and disappointed because they did not lead to what complaining parties sought: reinstatement of fired workers or new union formation at each of the workplaces. Moreover, because each of these cases involved the right to organize, one of the three “first-tier” labor principles, they could not proceed to evaluation or arbitration.

These criticisms should not be discounted. A “level playing field,” at least for irreducible “core” standards on such issues as freedom of association, nondiscrimination, and forced labor, for example, and strong, rapid enforcement against violators is the goal of everyone who advocates labor rights in international trade. However, criticism should be measured not against an ideal but against the reality of international trade and labor negotiations in the current regional and global economy. Even then, judging the effectiveness of the NAALC should await a broad experience of the

agreement’s potential uses. In this light, the scorn directed at the NAALC reflects more impatience than analysis.

Common Standards, Bureaucracy, and Tiers

It’s easy to hold in principle that a labor rights clause in a trade agreement ought to provide for universal standards. But it’s not so easy in practice, particularly when there is wide economic disparity among the negotiating countries, and when a single country accounts for 85 percent of the economic activity in the trade area.

In the NAFTA context there is also a sensitive problem of sovereignty concerns in all three countries. These are not just concerns of government officials; they are deeply held in all sectors of society, including trade unions and social activist communities. Many Mexican and Canadian labor policy analysts look at the state of U.S. labor law and the U.S. labor movement, and recoil at the prospect of homogenized labor laws. They are not about to give up laws created by their own representatives, administered by agencies accountable to their own executive branches, and reviewed by their own judiciary, to a new supranational agency that might be dominated by the economic interests of the United States.

U.S. trade unionists ought to be equally skeptical about solving their own labor law problems through some kind of international legerdemain. Could the NAFTA side agreement overturn the frequently proclaimed deficiencies in U.S. law—National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election rules, the striker replacement doctrine, contingent workers’ lack of protection, and others—without action by Congress? These are issues for American workers to address through their own organizing and political action, not by demanding some “silver bullet” in the NAALC.

Another problem with creating trilateral labor norms lies in the fundamental labor law jurisdiction of each country. Mexican labor law is primarily based in the federal Constitution and federal statutes, with a large state role in enforcement. Most of the maquiladora factories come under state government jurisdiction in the five border states of Mexico, for example. U.S.

labor law is also federal, but with a constricted role for the states. State moves to ban striker replacements, for example, have been struck down by the courts as pre-empted by federal law. In contrast, Canadian labor law is almost totally provincial, not federal. Each province enjoys its own sovereignty in fashioning and enforcing labor laws, and is not disposed to let the federal government hand over these matters to a trinational agency.

These differences did not just happen. They result from national histories replete with anti-colonial wars, civil wars, constitutional crises, regional conflicts, and class struggles. With three ministries of labor sitting down to negotiate the first labor agreement connected to a trade pact, it is unrealistic to expect them to undo these differences and defer to a supranational power.

The approach taken in the NAFTA side deal, emphasizing “effective enforcement” of domestic labor law, is a more practical starting point than attempting to fashion common norms. Any system of law is really only as good as its system of enforcement. U.S. experience with a resurgent sweatshop industry in major American cities should give pause to demands that Mexico or any developing country “raise” its standards to the levels of industrialized countries before enforcement is strengthened in every country.

Instead of yielding sovereignty over their labor laws and standards, the NAFTA countries shaped the NAALC to open themselves up to trinational scrutiny of their enforcement regimes. Such scrutiny is conducted under the NAALC’s review process, through special studies by the secretariat, and through evaluation and dispute resolution by independent, nongovernmental experts who are free to reach their own conclusions about the effectiveness of each country’s labor law enforcement. This represents an extraordinary candor in international relations, in contrast to traditional sovereignty rules. It should not be scorned because it fails to achieve a supposed ideal of international fair labor standards and swift, sure punishment powers.

As for bureaucracy, it is true that the NAFTA

labor side accord sets up a complex structure and procedures. But this is typical of international agreements. Anyone who ever brought a labor rights case to the International Labor Organization (ILO), to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), or to the Organization of American States (OAS) or the United Nations Human Rights Commissions can attest to their complex links, slow turns, and elliptical conclusions. For that matter, American trade unions and employers who have been through the mill of NLRB proceedings and their judicial appeals should hardly be disappointed in the world’s first international trade and labor agreement’s red tape.

Similarly, a “tiered” approach to labor issues is not unusual in the international context. The European Union (EU) also divides the twelve elements of its Social Charter into three tiers of treatment, much like those of the NAFTA labor pact. To be precise, the same subjects susceptible only to first level review in the North American scheme—rights of association and organizing, collective bargaining (as distinct from consultation with “works councils,” which are something else in the EU scheme), and the right to strike—are specifically *excluded* by the Maastricht Treaty from any form of Europe-wide legislation. For now, these issues are so central to national identity, history, and workplace culture that no society accepts changes forced from outside its own body politic.

The Cases

The first cases under NAALC provided an important forum for public discussion of labor conditions in NAFTA countries. Such matters had usually been taken up by anonymous officials in obscure proceedings. Now they are subjected to a formal, public review with cleansing sunshine effects.

While the first maquiladora cases ended with no follow-up ministerial consultations, publicity surrounding them prompted reinstatement of several workers, and widespread instructions from U.S. firms’ headquarters to their Mexican subsidiaries to comply carefully with Mexican labor laws.

Ministerial consultations in the other cases

led to a wide range of trilateral contacts and events that illuminate labor law realities in the three NAALC countries. One discussion, for example, compared Mexico's union registration system, the U.S. NLRB election system, and several Canadian provinces' "card-check" systems for union certification. In the Sprint case, the three labor ministers held a widely publicized public forum and instructed the trilateral labor secretariat to conduct the first-ever comparative study of the effects of plant closings on workers' freedom of association and right to organize in the three countries. Such mutual efforts are indispensable for creating a knowledge base for progress in trilateral treatment of labor rights issues.

Continued reviews can encourage governments to strengthen their enforcement efforts and encourage businesses to turn toward voluntary codes of conduct or some other form of self-regulation on workers' rights and labor standards. Where trade union actions are implicated in a review, efforts to strengthen democratic participation in union affairs may result.

N AFTA's labor side agreement contains several positive features for labor rights advocacy that ought to be appreciated, or at least tested over a long term, before drawing any conclusions about its worth. Used creatively, the agreement provides an opportunity for advancing workers' rights in the globalizing economy. It can be used in all three countries by trade unionists and labor rights advocates, by government officials responsible for labor standards, and by enterprises looking to a "high road" employment relations strategy. The challenge for labor rights supporters is to find such creative uses, not to lament lost opportunities for the perfect agreement.

The agreement's positive features include the establishment of the labor rights-trade linkage as a matter of policy in trade agreements; the wide range of the agreement's "Labor Principles," compared to the narrower definition of international labor rights in most other trade and labor contexts; and the variety of cross-border avenues and arenas that it opens up for international cooperation in support of workers' rights.

The Principle of the Thing

A strong reaction is underway against the very idea of a labor rights-trade link, also known as the "social clause" in trade discourse. The prime minister of Malaysia, for example, has repeatedly attacked labor rights proposals as an attempt to impose "Western values" and "Western concepts of trade unions" on developing Asian countries.

The ILO, the OECD, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other international bodies have all shied away from linking trade and labor rights. In this light, the NAALC is a unique accomplishment of the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States. It backs up the linkage of labor rights and trade policy with mechanisms for cross-border reviews and potential sanctions when workers' rights are violated and governments fail to enforce their laws. Critics should appreciate just how big a breakthrough it was for the North American trade negotiators to reach this point, compared to progress on the "social clause" in other contexts.

The Scope of the NAALC's "Labor Principles"

Another important breakthrough in the NAFTA side agreement lies in its movement beyond the usual formulation of "core" labor standards. Even while they reject a labor rights-trade link, the ILO, the European Union, the World Bank, and the OECD limit their debate to a labor rights "core" embracing freedom of association and the right to organize while barring forced labor and discrimination (sometimes adding child labor).

In contrast to these three or four issues, NAALC specifies eleven Labor Principles that run the length and breadth of workers' concerns. They include all those mentioned in other attempts to define a "core," and add a forthright endorsement of the right to strike—something most international instruments avoid (there is no ILO Convention on the right to strike, for example). NAALC goes on to embrace matters usually untreated in labor rights discourse but vitally important to workers—minimum wages,

CROSS-BORDER LABOR SOLIDARITY

Even before NAFTA, the United Electrical Workers union (UE) and the Mexican *Frente Auténtico del Trabajo* (FAT) fashioned a strategic organizing alliance targeting “runaway” General Electric plants in the maquiladora region. The Teamsters union and the FAT undertook similar efforts at a Honeywell plant without the formality of a written agreement. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) has developed close ties with the *Sindicato de Telefonistas de la Republica Mexicana* (STRM), the national telephone workers union of Mexico.

The International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, now joined in the new union UNITE, have carried out joint programs with unions in Mexico and Canada. In one “twin plant” setting with unionized shops in Eagle Pass, Texas, and Piedras Negras, Coahuila, for example, the UNITE local collaborated with its Mexican counterpart to achieve key contract gains in both factories. On a broader scale, the Texas state AFL-CIO has formed a Border Solidarity Committee to work with Mexican unions in the border region. Outside organized labor, a multitude of labor-allied nongovernmental organizations in the three countries have been conducting a series of trilateral conferences, workshops, research projects, and other bridge-building efforts for the past five years to press for a strengthened social dimension in North American economic integration. Few of these efforts would have been undertaken outside the NAFTA context.

The UE, the Teamsters, and the CWA filed NAFTA labor cases with the U.S. National Administrative Office on behalf of Mexican workers involved in FAT and STRM organizing efforts. Another case was filed by a coalition of four groups—the Washington-based International Labor Rights Fund, the Texas-based Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, the American Friends Service Committee Maquiladora Project, and the Mexican National Association of Democratic Lawyers—for a democratic union group in a Sony plant.

The assistance flows both ways. The Mexican STRM filed the Sprint case complaint on behalf of workers being organized in California by the CWA. In 1995 FAT organizers helped the UE win an organizing victory at a large manufacturing plant in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with a high complement of Mexican-American workers.

Mexican workers, union organizers and labor lawyers testified in public hearings in the U.S. on the G.E., Honeywell, and Sony cases. Mexican, U.S., and Canadian labor, democracy, and human rights advocates spoke out at public forums held by the U.S. and Mexican labor departments on union registration as part of the Sony case consultation. U.S. and Mexican unionists were joined by leaders of the Canadian, German, and British telephone workers unions in the public forum inspired by the Sprint case under the NAALC.

Even now, trade unionists in the United States, Mexico, and Canada are examining potential new submissions under the NAALC. All these steps required careful coordination to shape common positions. As those involved know each other better, they find new ways to link their movements. Although it is not *only* the labor side agreement driving these actions, the NAALC creates a framework for concrete work—developing strategies, drafting submissions, planning testimony, mounting press conferences, setting up demonstrations, meeting with government officials, participating in the agreement’s cooperative activities program and events that flow from ministerial consultations, and all the learning about each other’s countries and labor movements that takes place in the process.

—MARIA LORENA COOK □

hours of work, overtime pay, workers' compensation, protection of migrants, occupational safety and health. The fact that these issues are opened up to cross-border treatment gives the agreement a concrete content often lacking in vague "core" labor rights definitions.

Untested Forums

The cases raised thus far under the NAALC all involved the first of the agreement's eleven principles: freedom of association and the right to organize. No cases involving any of the other ten principles has been initiated. The agreement's independent evaluation procedure has not been invoked, nor has the arbitration mechanism been put to the test.

In sum, one subject matter—organizing—has been treated at the stage-one review level, when the potential exists for three subjects—organizing, bargaining, and striking—to get such first-level treatment. Five other subjects—forced labor, equal pay, nondiscrimination, workers compensation, and migrant labor—can get two levels of treatment: review and evaluation. Three more—child labor, minimum wages, and safety and health—can get all three levels of treatment: review, evaluation and arbitration. Experience with just one of a possible twenty-two combinations of subject and treatment is hardly the basis for conclusions about the agreement's worth.

The potential use of an Evaluation Committee of Experts (ECE) is especially interesting. Eight topics are susceptible to an evaluation under the NAALC. The ECE procedure is deliberately nonaccusatory. It can be initiated by one government alone, as long as it is willing to open up its own enforcement record in the subject matter being evaluated. But now it is not government officials undertaking the evaluation. It is an independent panel of experts from the three countries who can undertake their own comparative analysis, reports, and recommendations. This could be a powerful tool for promoting effective labor law enforcement. Interested unions, employers, or other groups could call to their government's attention problems that might lend

themselves to a ministerial request for an ECE. Collaborating across borders, such groups could encourage all the governments to undertake an ECE in a recognized area of common concern. Beyond that, they could ask for cases implicating child labor, minimum wage, or occupational safety and health issues to advance beyond evaluation to the dispute resolution level of treatment, if two governments agree to carry such cases forward.

Another key outgrowth of the NAFTA labor side accord is the process of exchange, communication, and collaboration among labor rights advocates at the trilateral level (see box). Under the agreement's unusual cross-cutting procedures, issues involving practices in one country must be initiated in or by another country. Thus, trade unionists and their allies are compelled to collaborate across North American borders to use NAALC mechanisms.

Labor rights advocates need to view the side agreement not as a chariot of fire righting all wrongs against labor, but as one that creates new space for governments, employers, and unions to honor workers' rights. This "opening up" of labor rights debates in both domestic and international forums is one of the most important results of NAALC.

Any number of idealized "social charters" with universal standards and swift, powerful enforcement powers could be drafted by critics of the labor side agreement. But the agreement had to be negotiated by sovereign governments, each with its own swirling, often clashing, business, labor, and political currents.

The result is a hybrid agreement. It preserves sovereignty, but creates mutual obligations. It sets up new domestic agencies as well as a trilateral secretariat. It combines broad cooperation and consultation programs alongside review, evaluation, and dispute resolution mechanisms. But above all, the agreement promotes *engagement* on labor rights and labor standards on an unprecedented international scale. It's worth becoming a player, not just a critic. □

CAPITALISM WITHOUT WORK

“So: tell me about yourself!” At a dinner party in the suburbs, skewered lamb cooking on the grill, the conversational tone flip-pant, the answer to this question is no longer framed in terms of a hobby, a sign of the Zodiac, or a profession; nowadays, being unemployed has become a conversation topic. You can run into anyone down at the unemployment office; class distinctions no longer hold.

The members of the professional elite are doing their best to preserve an ironic attitude toward the absurdities and humiliations of the job search. A teacher regales her listeners with the story of how she was told at the unemployment office to sign up for the course on “How to apply for a job” that she herself was offering not long ago. A biologist with years of research experience brings tears of laughter to the eyes of his audience, mimicking the personnel director who just interviewed him, solecisms, inappropriate questions, and all. Then comes the point of the story: sorry, he’s overqualified.

Insecurity on the labor market has long since spread beyond the “lower classes.” It has become the mark of our times. The old “lifetime profession” is threatened with extinction. No one wants to admit that with it an entire value system, a society based on gainful employment, will disappear.

Capitalism is killing off work. Unemployment no longer afflicts only those on the margin; it has the potential to strike all of us, and to put democracy as a way of life at risk. But as global capitalism divests itself of all responsibility for employment and for democracy, it is undermining its own legitimacy. Before a new Marx comes along to wake up the West, we had

better dig up some fresh ideas and models as the basis for a revised social contract. We have to lay the groundwork for democracy in a post-work society.

An example: in that promised land of employment, Great Britain, only a third of the able-bodied population is still employed in the classic sense—full-time, long-term, benefits guaranteed. In Germany, to be sure, the figure is still more than 60 percent. Only twenty years ago it was more than 80 percent in both countries. The heralded cure—making employment flexible—has merely covered over and prolonged the disease of unemployment, but has done nothing to cure it. On the contrary, the disease is spreading: unemployment and the confusing new phenomenon of part-time work, employment without security, and the still quiescent pool of surplus labor. We are headed for capitalism without work in all the postindustrial countries.

Three myths prevent those engaged in the public debate from recognizing the true state of affairs. First, the impenetrability myth: everything is just too complicated, the economy is beyond our understanding. Second, the service myth: the imminent upswing in the service economy will come to the rescue of the work-based society. Third, the labor-cost myth: all we have to do is get labor costs down to rock bottom and the problem of unemployment will solve itself.

That everything is connected with everything else (however loosely) and is therefore impenetrable can certainly be said of developments on the labor market in an era of forced

globalization. This does not, however, invalidate statements about secular trends, as demonstrated by the comparative international longitudinal studies that Meinhard Miegel presented to the Bavarian and Saxon Commission on the Future at its last conference in Dresden. According to Miegel, over the course of many generations the value of work has kept going up. In the mid-seventies a turning point was reached. Since then, gainful employment has been perceptibly shrinking everywhere, either directly through unemployment (as in Germany) or concealed behind exponentially growing "motley forms of employment" (as in the United States and Great Britain). The demand for work is declining, the supply of labor rising (also as a result of globalization). Indicators for a precipitous decline in gainful employment have reached the alarm stage.

We have long since moved from redistributing work to redistributing unemployment—this, too, disguised in the new forms of temporary, unskilled, part-time work. This holds true even for those so-called employment paradises, the United States and Great Britain, where growing numbers subsist in the twilight zone between work and no work, often making do with starvation wages.

Politicians and business leaders still think in the fictitious categories of full employment. Even savings banks and insurance companies offer loans and mortgages and underwrite policies on the assumption that people who are "employed" have a long-term guaranteed income. The rapidly spreading neither-nor situation—neither unemployed nor with a secure income—hardly fits this stereotype. Yet we still bemoan "massive unemployment," assuming that a person's natural condition from adulthood to retirement is full-time work.

Many believe, hope, and pray that the service economy will save us from the devouring monster of unemployment. This is the myth of service jobs. The calculations and counter-calculations have yet to be tested. New jobs will certainly be created. But first the opposite will occur: the traditionally secure core of jobs in the service sector will be swept away in a wave of automation that is just beginning to gather strength. Telebanking, for instance, will result

in the closing of many branch banks; telecommunications will eliminate about sixty thousand jobs in Germany alone; entire professions, like that of secretary, may disappear altogether. And even the new jobs that do spring up can be located just about anywhere. Many companies, of which American Express is a recent example, set up entire administrative divisions in countries with low wages, in this case South India.

The prophets of the information society who predicted a surplus of highly paid jobs even for people with minimal skills were wrong. The sobering fact is that even many of the jobs in data processing will be poorly paid and boring. U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich writes that data processors sitting in back rooms at computer terminals hooked up to worldwide databanks are the foot soldiers of the information economy.

Labor Costs

The illusion that occupies the key position in the current debate is the myth of labor costs. More and more people are succumbing to the often vehemently asserted conviction that only a radical reduction in labor costs and wages will lead us out of the vale of unemployment. Here the "American way" shines like a beacon.

But if we compare the United States with Germany, it turns out that the American "jobs miracle" is a mixed phenomenon. New jobs for highly trained workers that are both secure and well-paid are being created neither more nor less frequently than in a top-wage country like Germany; that is, at a rate of 2.6 percent, according to figures supplied in April 1996 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The difference between the two countries can be found in the growth of poorly paid unskilled jobs. But a comparison of productivity also takes the mystery out of the American "solution." In the last twenty years, productivity in the United States has increased by only 25 percent, whereas in Germany it has risen a full 100 percent. "How in the world do the Germans do it?" an American colleague asked me recently. "They work so much less and produce so much more."

Here we have the new law of productivity

that global capitalism in the information age has discovered: fewer and fewer well-trained and globally interchangeable people can generate more and more output and services. Thus economic growth no longer reduces unemployment but actually requires a reduction in the number of jobs.

Let there be no illusion: a capitalism focused only on ownership and profits, which turns its back on the employed, on the social-welfare state, and on democracy, will undermine itself. While the profit margins of the multinational corporations are growing, these same companies are stripping the high-priced countries of both jobs and tax revenue. Two chronically impoverished sources—public funds and the private funds of those who are still employed—are supposed to pay for everything the rich also continue to enjoy: schools and universities with sophisticated facilities, smoothly functioning transportation systems, environmental protection, safe roads, the wealth of opportunities afforded by urban living.

Democracy in Europe and the United States was originally a “democracy of work,” in the sense that it rested on participation in gainful employment. Citizens had to earn their keep in one way or another in order to give content to their freedoms. Work for pay always formed the basis not only for private but also for political existence. So what is now at risk is not “merely” millions without work. Not “merely” the social-welfare state, or the prevention of poverty, or the possibility of justice. Political freedom and Western democracy are at risk.

The connection that exists in the West between capitalism and basic political, social, and economic rights is far more than a mere “social benefit” that can be dispensed with when things get tight. Rather, socially buffered capitalism was a response to the experience of fascism and the challenge of communism, a response developed at no small cost. This form of capitalism represents the enlightened recognition that only when people have a decent place to live and a secure job can they function as citizens who embrace democracy and make it come alive. The truth is simple: without material security, no po-

litical freedom. And no democracy—which in turn leaves people at the mercy of old and new totalitarian regimes and ideologies.

We must beat it into the heads of these pseudo-free democrats or free pseudo-democrats, who turn a deaf ear to historical experience, that the market fundamentalism they idolize is a form of democratic illiteracy. What the market precisely does not do is provide its own justification. This form of economy can survive only in conjunction with material security, social rights, and democracy. Anyone who relies solely on the market destroys democracy and along with it this form of economy.

Today, the only serious opponent of capitalism is . . . capitalism based exclusively on profit. Disastrous tidings on the employment front are hailed as victories on Wall Street. The underlying arithmetic is easy to see: when labor costs fall, profits go up. Yet the contradictions of “jobless capitalism” are becoming apparent. The directors of multinational corporations ship administrative functions off to South India but send their own children to the great publicly financed universities of Europe. It would never occur to them to move to the places where they are creating low-paying jobs and paying low corporate taxes.

Without a moment’s hesitation they lay claim to the costly political, social, and civil rights whose public financing they are torpedoing. They go to the theater. They enjoy expensively maintained open space. They frolic in the still relatively crime- and violence-free capitals of Europe. But at the same time they are contributing, through their egotistic economic behavior and their profit-oriented policies, to the destruction of this European way of life. May we ask where they or their children intend to live when the costs of maintaining the democratic state can no longer be met?

Public Work

In the old industrial society, two “employers” occupied the dominant position: capital and the state. In the future, both will be chronically absent in this function. Capitalism is creating joblessness and will more and more be jobless. To call the public coffers “empty” is more than an

understatement. We have the choice of wailing about that or creating a new focus of activity and identity that will revitalize the democratic way of life: "public work." If public discourse is the art of involving strangers in a continuing discussion of what affects them most intimately, public work is the art of making deeds follow the words. So what does this concept imply?

First, active compassion: environmental activists in Germany are motivated by fear of destruction and deterioration, but even more by indignation at the thoughtless way in which most people behave. Active resistance to indifference has many goals and many faces: work with the elderly and the handicapped, with the homeless and with AIDS patients, with illiterates and the excluded; with women's centers, Greenpeace, Amnesty International, and so forth. "Public work" in this sense means an odd blend of politics, care for others, and everyday cooperation.

Second, practical critique: many lawyers, tax consultants, physicians, businesspeople, and administrators want to use their professional skills in different settings for a change—exerting influence over public opinion and legislation, devising economic strategies for self-help groups, providing information on avoiding tax liability, advising people on handling debt, calling attention to health and safety risks, and so on. Why not establish prizes and awards for such forms of civil resistance? (Of course, citizens should be the ones to award them.)

Third, active democracy: citizen participation and decentralization. In the administration of many cities and communities, a small cultural revolution has broken out. It promises to bring not only greater efficiency but also a gain in democracy. "All these citizen initiatives just duplicate existing governmental bodies," a city councilman grumbles. But that is precisely the point: people acquire a taste for democracy by practicing it. Freedom begets, strengthens, and expands freedom.

What all this means is that we have to invest in civil society. We have to delegate power and authority to it, and in every respect: technologically (information media), economically (basic investment), educationally (certification that will be valid on the labor market as well).

How do the values and goals of an earnings-based society relate to the grassroots organization of civil society? The relationship is one not of mutual exclusion but of complementarity. In the future, what will probably win out is a blending of formal work and voluntary organization, the dismantling of legal and mobility barriers between the two sectors, the creation of opportunities for leaving or changing one's principal occupation (in an annual, monthly, or weekly rhythm). Two things would thus become possible: first, the equation of public activity with remunerated employment would be broken. Second, public work would create new foci of political action and identity-formation within and opposed to a fragmented society. The material and cultural foundations for "individualism coupled with solidarity" would be established.

Four objections will serve to sharpen this apparently simple idea and show how it can be turned into a viable reality. First: won't public work come to grief the moment it encounters the selfishness that has overrun our society? Second: who is supposed to pay for this? Third: is such a thing possible under conditions of globalization? Fourth: won't "creative unemployment" (Ivan Illich's term) make people unhappy? Doesn't identity crumble when gainful employment is taken away?

Let's look first at the much maligned "selfish society." The American sociologist Robert Wuthnow has shown that without voluntary efforts dedicated to others, all modern societies would collapse immediately. Eighty million Americans, or 45 percent of those above the age of eighteen, commit five hours or more, week after week, to helping others or working for charitable purposes. The monetary value of these efforts amounts to about \$150 billion per year.

This study also shows that for 75 percent of the American population solidarity, helpfulness, and concern for the general welfare are as important as self-actualization, professional success, and expansion of personal freedom. The notion of the "selfish society" assumes that two things are mutually exclusive that in fact belong together: self-actualization and being there for

others.

That the situation is any different in Europe can be believed only by those who confuse commitment with membership in organizations. Although young people are staying away in droves from organized churches, parties, unions, and associations, private initiatives of all sorts are attracting participants in record numbers. According to a poll of European Community countries, these same young people who shun the tedium of collective organizations express strong support (over 80 percent) for environmental causes; 73 percent see homelessness as a major issue and want to do something about it personally; 71 percent demand more rights for the handicapped; 71 percent support feminism and see it as important for both men and women.

As for the decline in values and the growth of indifference among young people, a trend already bemoaned by Plato, these too are connected to a "blockage of institutional commitments." Young people are given rights, but citizen initiatives are more and more hemmed in by governmental restrictions. Power is not really delegated; many are reluctant to get involved because they have already found that "nothing comes of it."

Who Pays?

Who is supposed to finance investment in "social capital" in an active society? In Germany we have over four trillion marks in private household accounts, very unequally distributed. Ten percent of all households account for a good 49 percent of the wealth; 40 percent of households for the next 49 percent; 50 percent of households have only 2.4 percent of all private wealth.

The entrepreneurs have discovered the mother lode. Their new magic formula goes this way: capitalism without work plus capitalism without taxes. Revenue from the corporation tax, the tax on company profits, fell between 1989 and 1993 by 18.6 percent; its share in the total tax revenue was cut almost in half (from 6.4 to 3.7 percent), while at the same time profits rose by more than 10 percent. These data reveal, among other things, the new power relationships created by globalization. Many companies are

becoming taxpayers only in principle, not in fact.

Capital is globally mobile; nation states, on the other hand, have to stay put. When the manufacture of a product is spread over several countries and continents, it becomes increasingly difficult to assign the profit to a specific locale; at the same time, strategies whereby companies can undermine the tax system become easier to implement.

The internationalization of production gives companies two strategic advantages: global competition springs up between expensive and inexpensive labor, and the tax structures and monitoring systems of various countries can be played off against each other and subverted. In the newfound power of the multinational corporations we can observe the successful application of the laws of the free market to the political realm. In reality, however, the situation is much more dicey. Since utilization of numerous social resources (expensive universities, hospitals, transportation systems, the courts, research funds) is not restricted to the place where taxes are assessed, many corporations are in a position to minimize their tax burden while establishing their headquarters in the countries that maintain the best infrastructures.

The sites of investment, production, taxation, and residence can now be completely uncoupled from one another. Once again, business leaders take advantage of the low tax rates of the poor countries while enjoying the high standard of living found in the rich countries. They pay taxes where it is cheapest and live where conditions are most appealing. This situation carries considerable potential for social conflict. First of all, tension arises between virtual and real taxpayers—that is, those individuals who still have work and the smaller companies that are not in a position to move and thereby escape regular taxation. These are the losers in the globalization game.

Then, too, it is precisely the champions of economic growth, assiduously wooed by the politicians, who are undermining the authority of the state by taking advantage of its offerings while snatching away its revenues. These new virtuosi of virtual taxation are subverting the general welfare in a legal but illegitimate fashion, and along with it political life and the demo-

cratic state. Neoliberal policies, which uncritically embrace the free market, have much in common with those proponents of efficiency in business who make themselves superfluous.

There is only one conclusion to be drawn: we must break the taboo on speaking of this new social injustice. Those who profit from globalization must be made accountable for the general welfare. Our system of social welfare needs reforming in many respects, but paradoxically the answer is not less but more money, properly invested and distributed! For investments in public work the watchword is: a little goes a long way. Society flourishes, public wealth grows.

Here it becomes clear that we need a new definition of "wealth." Among other things, this definition must include such indicators as social participation and political freedom. For a society whose economy is flourishing while putting people out of work is not a "rich" society but only a rump society for the rich.

Who is supposed to pay for this? Let me propose three speculative models.

Model 1: tax abatement. Here those who contribute to the general welfare must be allowed to pay substantially lower taxes (as individuals can already deduct contributions and charitable organizations can claim tax-exempt status). Objection: at the level of household income, this model is predicated on wage-bearing work. Those who are already earning well will be given the opportunity to enrich their lives through public commitment.

Model 2: tax-financed basic support payment. Here those who participate in voluntary organizations receive a sort of "public stipend" (as has already been partially implemented in Saxony). If the "American model" results in a combination of full employment and growth in the number of the working poor, the "German (European) model" could have as its goal a combination of wage-earning work and state-financed participation in civil society. Those who commit themselves to voluntary organizations

are no longer "available for the labor market" and in this sense are no longer "unemployed." They are active citizens who get involved on behalf of the general welfare and receive in return (time-limited) basic support payments.

Model 3: citizens' support for all, financed through taxation; the appropriate amount is open to discussion. Many fear that this type of basic support will permanently stereotype and exclude from jobs and society those most at risk—women, the poor, the disabled. It would thus be essential not to pay out citizens' support in cold cash, but to link it with opportunities for active participation suitable for an inclusive society.

Can such a millennial reform be instituted in a single country? If the basic diagnosis offered here is correct—capitalism is becoming jobless and is creating joblessness—we are dealing with a global challenge that will sooner or later confront all highly developed societies. But the country that first finds a practicable response, that meets the risks to democracy head-on, will be ahead of the game (economically as well).

As for the alleged monopoly that gainful employment has on identity formation, empirical studies have already shown that a far-reaching change of attitude is underway: more and more people are looking for both meaningful work and opportunities for commitment outside of work. If society can upgrade and reward such commitment and put it on a level with gainful employment, it can create both individual identity and social cohesion.

The scenario I have sketched here can be summed up in a plea to take the invisible practice of social self-help and grassroots political organization and make it visible. Give it economic, organizational, and political weight. This becomes possible only if we invest in civil society, thereby democratizing democracy, so to speak. What we need is a citizen-state alliance for civil society, if need be in opposition to work and capital. But this alliance should attract all those who hold democracy dear.

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WHY WORRY ABOUT MULTICULTURALISM?

Why do we worry so much about multiculturalism? The “we” is, as usual, deceptive, for worries about multiculturalism come from different and incompatible directions. For some people, the main complaint is that too many people from minority cultures have been allowed into the country, and that their unfamiliar customs are threatening the integrity of the majority culture. For some others, the main complaint is that multiculturalism encourages a hybrid eclecticism that undermines the integrity of the *minority* cultures. What interests me here is a subset of worries that preoccupies people with left-liberal inclinations: those whose political identifications have always linked them to groups “outside” an established mainstream.

The impetus toward multiculturalism comes primarily from members of minority cultures, but much of its initial support derives from the liberal left—and for obvious reasons. Anyone with a history of challenging dominant power structures is likely to be well attuned to a critique of a dominant culture, and will warm to the suggestion that nations are not as homogeneous as their mythologies suggest. Many of the anxieties about multiculturalism, however, stem from the very same quarter. Those who have resisted the coercive pretensions of a unified national culture may find themselves equally resistant to a defense of minorities that defines individuals through their communities and cultures. The first tries to dragoon us all into conformity with some majoritarian ideal, but the second can look just as conformist; it loosens the hold of a single culture only to tighten the chains of culture *per se*. Multiculturalism sometimes appears as the obvious extension of a left-

liberal politics, but sometimes as diametrically opposed, and I have been struck on many occasions by the way people who otherwise find themselves in broad political agreement diverge sharply when the claims of minority cultures come under discussion. Why do “we” (in this sense) worry so much about multiculturalism?

There are three interrelated worries. Does multiculturalism imply relativism? Does multiculturalism fragment people in ways that dissolve any semblance of shared citizenship and block alliances for future social change? Does multiculturalism mean that societies must condone what many will view as illiberal or undemocratic practice? I take these in turn (though they are not as distinct as this suggests), and argue that much of the anxiety, particularly around the first two questions, is misplaced.

Relativism

Does multiculturalism imply relativism? It clearly throws into question the dominance of one particular culture. It draws our attention to the existence of *many* cultures; it requires us to reconsider the arrogance that simply presumes one of these to be superior to all the others; and it suggests that we should regard each culture as entitled to equal respect. Now, if cultures were simply a matter of style and taste (different ways of preparing food, different traditions of music or art) this would hardly present problems to our left-liberal. It might cause concern to people whose habits had been frozen for generations, or to those who muddle up their preferences with their moral prescriptions, but outside such circles, it is not a particularly threatening no-

tion. Nothing much hangs on a benign acknowledgment that all cuisines have something to offer; saying this does not commit me to changing my own eating habits; and there is nothing inconsistent in saying that kangaroo steaks are fine, but I couldn't bear to eat them. (This begs questions about vegetarianism, but I'll leave them to one side.)

The problem is that culture means far more than this. It includes different ways of thinking about morality and religion, different traditions of resolving political conflict, different assumptions about the roles of women and men. If all these are to be deemed worthy of equal respect, this looks like a suspension of critical judgment. How are we to articulate notions of right or wrong if multiculturalism imposes a polite silence in relation to the practices of others? How are we even to arrive at any notions of right and wrong if different traditions are treated as of equal value? The solipsism that says, "This is right for me, but I can't comment on what is right for you" is a poor guide to political action. If this is what multiculturalism means, you can see why left-liberals get edgy.

Much of this anxiety is, I believe, misplaced; it mistakes what is implied in multiculturalism, and it overstates the degree of certainty that is required for political action. Equal respect does *not* mean suspending critical judgment: on the contrary, we do not take other cultures seriously when we don't consider them worthy of our critique. People who find themselves in a cultural minority will sometimes settle for a patronizing acceptance, regarding this as a minor advance over being told to abandon their backward ways. But most people consider their own culture superior to that of others (why else would they retain it?), and what they look for is a more sustained engagement among competing cultures. If we take our culture seriously (and this applies equally whether we are in a majority or a minority), then we almost certainly think it has something to offer to people outside. We may not want others to adopt it wholesale: orthodox Judaism, for example, discourages the missionary spirit, regarding Jewishness as a matter of inheritance more than conversion; and even those who are more proselytizing about their cultural/religious/political framework of-

ten exhibit a snobbish suspiciousness toward those who want to join them. That said, equal respect must surely entail attending to what people do and argue, and we cannot do this if we suspend our critical faculties.

Multiculturalism does not require an *a priori* commitment to the equal value of different cultures. It does, however, require us to view our own culture as one among many, and this certainly means rethinking what we might have considered transcultural absolutes as more parochial expressions of a particular culture. If we regard our judgments as justified only by a process of absolute certification, then we may have cause to fear this, but how many of us today still believe in transcultural absolutes? The most cursory acquaintance with intellectual history demonstrates that ideas have been shaped by historical conditions, and it would take the arrogance of a Hegel or a Marx to say we have now arrived at the final stage. I have to say that I find it deeply puzzling when skeptical self-reflection is said to condemn one to political paralysis. Why should it be so difficult to act on what one conceives to be right, even while acknowledging the revisability of one's most cherished ideals? Coming to recognize, for example, the occidental arrogance of American modernization theory does not condemn one to what John Dunn describes as its crude antithesis: "the idiot relativism of presuming the cultures of all national units (and thus presumably of no subnational units) to deserve an equal and untrammelled degree of credal respect."¹ To bring Karl Popper to my aid at this point, it is only when scientists hope to prove their hypotheses beyond any doubt that describing a hypothesis as so-far-unfalsified looks so feeble; once we give up on the extravagant expectation of final proof, then accepting the provisional nature of all existing hypotheses just looks like a sensible approach. When it comes to matters of moral or political judgment, acknowledging one's own, almost inevitable, partiality does not prevent action on what, at present, there is good reason to believe. If we acted only on what was certain, only dogmatists would ever bother to stir.

The point about cultures is that they structure the way we experience and the way we think. None of us sprang up overnight like Hobbes's famous mushrooms, and all of us are simultaneously empowered and constrained by the cultural assumptions through which we have come to view the world. Knowing this—and knowing at the same time that there are many cultures—we cannot but see ourselves as partial, with our most certain convictions always open to subsequent revision. The equal respect we owe to people from other cultures is best expressed in assuming that they were similarly formed; that all of us have learned particular ways of seeing the world; and that none of us has a monopoly on wisdom or truth. In his book *Strange Multiplicity*, James Tully calls for “an endless dialogue of humankind” that will correct his own tendency “to write as if all the world is America, and the analogous tendencies of the other participants.”² We cannot participate in this dialogue if we start from a position of knowing it all, or if we end up in a state of unshakable conviction about whatever has emerged as our latest conclusion. This undoubtedly constrains the certainty with which we affirm our positions, but it does not prevent us from formulating (revisable) principles that we regard as applying to all people everywhere. Multiculturalism does not imply relativism.

Fragmentation

The second worry is that multiculturalism fragments people in ways that dissolve the potential for shared action, and this worry arises with particular intensity for those formed through socialist politics. Socialists look to the solidarities that unify across difference as the main avenue for social change, and they have always worried about the divisive effects of cultural identity. The key point of contact between socialism and multiculturalism is that both question the mythologies of “the nation” or “the common good”; as Michael Walzer has noted, “Marxism was the first challenge to the traditional argument for national homogeneity; ethnic pluralism is the second.”³ But the socialist critique of national culture has usually been taken to include criticism of subnational cul-

tures as well. Socialists regard shared cultural traditions as less formative or less significant than shared class locations, and they are rarely at ease with assertions of ethnic identity. So while many socialists will go along with the vision of contemporary societies as multi- rather than monocultural, they often have difficulty with the rights of minority cultures to sustain their unique traditions.

Socialists find multiculturalism most congenial when they see it as pluralizing a hegemonic establishment culture: they like to live in areas that are ethnically and culturally diverse; they like to send their children to schools where they will make friends from a variety of cultural and national traditions; they like the idea of a multicultural curriculum that exposes the absurd pretensions of a single national identity and promotes sympathies across nations. But multiculturalism typically generates rather stronger demands. In the British context, for example, where schools are required to provide some kind of religious education and assembly, parents from non-Christian faiths often become frustrated with what they see as their children's induction into a mishmash of world religions; when their own children make up a majority within a school, they may call for more sustained emphasis on teaching their own religion.⁴ Many, indeed, prefer the option of separate schools: instead of the multiculturalism that spreads a thin veneer of diversity over a predominantly Christian or European culture, they may look to the kind of multiculturalism that promotes schools organized around each of the different religions; they may want a multiplicity of distinct cultures rather than an amalgam that takes bits from each.

Schooling is a notoriously difficult example: first, because it deals with the rights or freedoms of parents, when in fact it is the children who carry the consequences of parental choice; and second, because the choices people make in education have a particularly stark and self-evident effect on the choices left available for others. Thus, if parents choose single-sex schools for their girls (which looks like a sensible choice, on both scholastic and social

grounds), this makes it impossible for parents to choose mixed-sex schools for their boys (which also looks like a sensible choice, on both scholastic and social grounds). Or if those who have the opportunity choose to send their children to private or selective schools, this leaves the other parents choosing among schools that draw their pupils from a more limited range of educational achievement and occupational background. In the more obviously multicultural dilemma, if parents with strong religious beliefs choose to send their children to denominational schools, this makes it difficult for parents who value a diversity of religions to find a suitably "mixed" school; and where religion overlaps with cultural and ethnic difference, this can produce an unintended degree of segregation.

The first two examples help put the third into better perspective, for many of the problems we address under the heading of multiculturalism relate to more general issues about the way the rights or choices of one group constrain the rights or choices of another. Today's socialists would certainly not want to be accused of subordinating freedom to equality, nor would they want to align themselves with a statist uniformity that tramples on minority concerns. But if socialists know anything, it is that formal freedoms of choice can coexist with, and often intensify, material inequalities of condition. Part of the difficulty socialists then have with multiculturalism is that it highlights as yet unresolved questions about how far socialism can go in accommodating freedom of choice. But it is not only multiculturalism that poses these questions.

I do not propose to resolve this dilemma here, but it helps moderate some of the worries about multiculturalism if we see them as part of this bigger picture. When we disaggregate what is at stake in accusations of fragmentation, we find at least three different concerns. One is that recognizing the legitimacy of cultural claims means giving weight to demands that could never be met in their entirety; in the face of a potentially unending plethora of demands, the temptation is simply to deny them their initial legitimacy. Countries with a predominantly Christian tra-

dition, for example, do not schedule public examinations to coincide with Christian festivals. Should we not say, in all fairness, that they should also avoid scheduling exams to coincide with the key festivals of other religions? This strikes me as a perfectly reasonable question, but the greater the diversity of religions, the less possible it becomes to arrange things to meet every such demand; and since moving to accommodate only one extra religion merely highlights the inequity toward everyone else (including those who can't see why religion should be given such prominence), one is tempted to rule the question out of court. If we go down that road, we might say, there is no knowing where it will end. Far better to stumble on with the pretense of a unified citizenry.

A similar pattern of argument often develops in the face of claims for the political representation of underrepresented groups. Those of us who have advocated quota systems to achieve greater parity of representation between women and men often find ourselves presented with the notorious "slippery slope": if women, why not people from ethnic minorities? if either of these, why not homosexuals, pensioners, the unemployed, the disabled, why not people with blue eyes and red hair? In my view, consistency (not to mention justice) does require us to address the additional underrepresentation of ethnic minorities,⁵ but then how is one to develop a strategy that achieves the "fair representation" of all ethnic groups, when these subdivide into ever finer discriminations between different countries of origin and a wide diversity of different cultures or religions? Faced with a possible fragmentation into ever more minute distinctions, the temptation, once again, is not to begin the process.

This all-or-nothing argument strikes me as logic gone mad. It employs a measure of logical consistency against which all existing political arrangements would fail, and then appeals to this as a basis for refusing to consider any new proposals. It constrains in advance what even gets on the agenda; it also seriously underestimates the human capacity for negotiation and compromise. Consider the parallel issues that arise when universities schedule classes at the times least convenient to students (usu-

ally women) who have to collect children from school. No one who raises this as an objection believes that universities could rearrange all their classes at times convenient to such students, but knowing this does not make it absurd to raise the issue. In a similar vein, I would say that no society could organize its political affairs, or sustain any semblance of national unity, if it fragmented the citizens into a thousand subgroups, each with its own claims to representation. But we do not have to choose between an unstoppable logic of further fragmentation and naive assertions of indivisible unity. Human beings are usually rather good at finding middle positions between formal extremes, and there is no reason why this should be the one exception.

The second concern that surfaces under the heading of fragmentation is that recognizing the legitimacy of cultural claims threatens uniformity of treatment. Many of the demands associated with multiculturalism call for flexibility in the interpretation of laws and regulations so as to make them more sensitive to the conventions of different cultures: one obvious example from Britain is that a perfectly sensible law requiring motorcycle riders to wear helmets nonetheless exempts Sikh men. The anxieties such adjustments arouse reflect the fear, already noted, of what is seen as an unstoppable momentum: once societies allow for one exception, we are told, they will be drawn into a second and a third, and there will be no logical stopping place short of total diversity of treatment. This part of the argument also strikes me as logic gone mad, for while consistency certainly requires societies to consider whether an exception on behalf of one group implies an exception on behalf of some other, there are many criteria that would enter into this calculation, and the outcome is not decided in advance. The importance of a particular practice to the group in question is one possible criterion; whether the proposed concession conflicts with core beliefs of the society is another. This is not a matter of abstract logic, but of negotiation among a range of significant concerns.

The more serious question is whether soci-

eties can ever allow themselves to modify the principle of uniform treatment. Again, it is helpful to see this as part of a broader picture. The notion that we may better approximate equality through differential rather than identical treatment has gained strength in feminist circles—and has, indeed, a prehistory in the writings of Marx. The idea that we treat people equally by treating them exactly the same seems distinctly weird to me, and if we know it to be a nonsense across extraordinary disparities of wealth, it doesn't seem difficult to extend this across differences in cultural practice and conventions. The importance people attach to uniformity is best understood as a displacement from its sister concept, consistency. It is consistency that is the important principle, with uniformity as one possible means to this end. If schools draw up dress codes for their pupils (to take an obvious if banal example), these should surely be consistent between boys and girls: it would be inconsistent to insist on the boys wearing ties, while allowing the girls to dress as informally as they want; it would be inconsistent to prevent the girls from wearing jeans while allowing this to the boys. One conventional way of achieving the desired consistency is to require all children to wear a school uniform—though typically, the boys then wear trousers and the girls wear skirts, so this is hardly uniformity of treatment. The standard alternative is more open: thus schools will often ban certain styles of dress or ornament, and will then have to work out some rule of thumb that makes this consistent between boys and girls. Inconsistency would indeed compromise equality of citizenship, but consistency does not translate into uniformity, and often requires distinct differences in treatment.

The third concern is the more specifically socialist one: that giving “undue” credibility to the many cultures that make up contemporary societies threatens the solidarities on which we base our hopes for social change. This is what underlies many of the worries about fragmentation, and it arises with particular intensity in a period that has witnessed the weakening of older solidarities forged around class, and has not yet produced a definitive alternative. Capitalism used to be thought of as the great simplifier: in those famous

phrases from *The Communist Manifesto*, it dissolves national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness, sweeps away ancient and venerable prejudices, obliterates distinctions of labor, splits society more and more into two great hostile camps. The reality has been infinitely more complicated, and people continue to derive their political identities from a diverse combination that includes class, sex, race, ethnicity, language, religion, region, country of origin. These are facts of life in contemporary societies, but there is still a question about whether one should boost this process by giving added legitimacy to cultural difference.

When this is posed as a worry about fragmentation, it sounds rather disingenuous, for all solidarities are forged by highlighting one part of our existence over others. Sometimes people stress gender to unify across class or religious or ethnic divisions; sometimes they stress class to unify across trade or country of origin; sometimes they stress race to unify across class and gender. It is not the partiality that is the problem in any of these. The underlying issue is whether some of these identities are “better,” “more progressive” than others. The old left, of course, had what it saw as analytical reasons for its primary emphasis on class: it saw this as more fundamental, a more “real” source of commonality than nationality or religion or sex. The newer left is less disposed to privilege one identity as more fundamental (it can see how the privileging of class, for example, operated to make gender invisible), but it still fears that stressing culture as the unifying element will prove more conservative in its effects. It is frequently suggested, for example, that recognizing the rights of cultural minorities will strengthen the powers of men over women, or the old over the young, within the minority culture. The primacy attached to culture may then lend itself to less democratic or more illiberal practice. This, in my view, is the really substantive problem posed by multiculturalism.

Illiberal or Undemocratic Practices

Arguments for a more multicultural understanding of citizenship often start from the value of cultural membership: the notion that people can

only make meaningful choices when they have a relatively secure home within a recognized culture; or that their self-respect is bound up with the esteem in which their culture is held. The importance this attaches to cultural membership may, however, privilege the need for a distinct culture over the need for “a kaleidoscope of cultures.”⁶ It may end up privileging those who wish to sustain unique cultures over those who value a more cosmopolitan life; and in treating culture as a primary good, it may end up trumping other kinds of rights.

There is a danger here, and it parallels that which bedevils so much contemporary discussion of the family, where people move too rapidly from describing something as a good to describing it as vital, and then to disparaging any alternatives. In their pronouncements on the family, politicians and journalists often start from the truism that it is good for children to have two parents who love and care for them. Who could seriously disagree with this? All too often, however, the truism is equated with a far more contentious assertion: that the two-parent family is vital to each child’s well-being. Something that is good is turned into something that is vital, and in the process, the component that makes it good (that both parents love and care for the child) is often transmuted into a mere necessity for both parents to be there. From a relatively uncontroversial beginning, we end up with an attack on single-parent families, and a celebration of any and all two-parent families as providing the best kind of care.

The parallel sleight of hand in relation to culture would start from the relatively uncontroversial observation that cultures are important to people’s freedom and self-esteem and end up prescribing membership in a particular culture as a necessity of human life. (In a recent novel, Steven Lukes conjures up a nightmarish land called Communitaria, where everyone must belong to one of thirty-four ethnic communities and one of seventeen religions, and where political representation is organized exclusively through these memberships.⁷) The question this poses is whether we can say that cultural membership is good without claiming that it is vital. Can we accept the beginning without moving inexorably on to the end? I believe we can. There is no contradiction, as Will

Kymlicka notes, between saying that most people have a deep bond to their own culture, and yet that some people seem most at home leading a cosmopolitan life—and that others have difficulty making sense of the cultural meanings within their own culture.⁸ Nor is there any necessary contradiction—though there may certainly be conflicts—between providing public resources to sustain particular cultures and supporting individual members who decide to opt out. The key question, in my view, is whether we conceive of multiculturalism as required by considerations of equity or as derived from a thesis about culture as a primary good. The first approach—which is the one I favor—allows us and indeed requires us to consider the equitable treatment of minority and majority cultures alongside other considerations of equity—say, between women and men. The second approach is more problematic, for in elevating cultural membership to the status of a primary good (something *vital* to any human existence), it potentially trumps all other considerations.

As long as we follow the first, however, there is no inherent contradiction between supporting policies that recognize and help sustain minority cultures and opposing practices within minority cultures that we consider illiberal or undemocratic. There is a *theoretical* problem—who is the “we” that makes these judgments, and what is the basis for defining what is liberal or democratic?—and in the spirit of my

comments on relativism, I would caution against the majoritarian arrogance that assumes “we” have reached a final definition. But the *political* problems are much exaggerated, for minorities living within the framework of what are broadly (if always incompletely) liberal democracies have accommodated themselves without objection to most of what are considered core equalities or freedoms. It is important, as Kymlicka notes, not to prejudice the illiberal nature of a particular minority culture, for “all cultures have repressive strands, just as few cultures are entirely repressive of individual liberty.”⁹ It is also important not to read off minority cultures from what turn out to be minorities within them: to assume that all Muslims, for example, want sex-segregated education or oppose equal opportunities for boys and girls (and that no Christian would ever share such a preference).

The debate on multiculturalism is still inhibited by a tendency to exaggerate the differences among cultures, and exaggerate the logical implications of recognizing any cultural claims. Yet where conflicts do arise (and I do not mean to suggest that they won’t), they are much like other conflicts that we have accepted as a necessary part of contemporary political life. Moving toward a more self-consciously multicultural citizenship certainly extends the range of what is open for negotiation, but the problems associated with multiculturalism are not unique. Nor, given the requirements of equity, are they avoidable. □

Notes

¹ John Dunn, “Identity, modernity, and the claim to know better” in *Rethinking Modern Political Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 143.

² James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 182.

³ Michael Walzer, “Pluralism: A Political Perspective,” reprinted in Will Kymlicka (ed.), *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 145.

⁴ In a recent example from a primary school in Birmingham where Muslim children make up 70 percent of the school population, parents have withdrawn their children from the mainstream—multifaith—religious education, and won the right for one hour each week of segregated religious education, to be taught by a trained teacher who is also a Muslim scholar (*The Observer*, Feb. 25, 1996).

As one of the parent-governors explained, “Multifaith education nurtures a spectator approach to all religion . . . If you believe in all religions, you end up believing in none.”

⁵ For a fuller discussion of this, see Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁶ I take this phrase from Jeremy Waldron, “Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative,” reprinted in Will Kymlicka (ed.), *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁷ Steven Lukes, *The Curious Enlightenment of Professor Caritat* (Verso, 1995).

⁸ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 90.

⁹ Kymlicka, p. 171.

Iris Young

THE COMPLEXITIES OF COALITION

One audacity of neoconservatives is their appropriation of the radical egalitarian rhetoric of the 1960s. In his recent book, *The Affirmative Action Fraud*, for example, Clint Bolick calls for a restoration of the Founding Fathers' "civil rights vision." According to Bolick and other conservatives, commitment to race and gender blindness was enshrined in the Constitution in 1789; while American practices did not always live up to these ideals, a steady progress brought us as a nation to real equality. Since the 1960s, however, a "politics of difference" has torn apart America's common fabric, with groups claiming that they are oppressed, and demanding to be noticed in their social difference and cultural specificity. These groups call for "special rights," like affirmative action, comparable worth, ordinances forbidding discrimination against gays and lesbians, Indian fishing rights, and protections for labor organizing. America can only be put back on the road to happiness and prosperity if we restore the ancient "civil rights vision" that ignores differences of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or class.

Neoconservative amnesia about slavery, the Civil War, exclusion of women, extermination of Indians, discrimination against Jews, suppression of Chicanos, is certainly disturbing. It is laughable to portray today's protest groups as the creators of conflict over race, gender, and class to which their movements are in fact a response. It is more disturbing, however, to hear respected leaders and writers of the left singing a similar tune.

In an article on third-party movements in the United States in February of 1996, *In These Times* editor James Weinstein asserts that the

left has been impotent since the 1960s because it has fragmented into gender, racial, and ethnic groupings. Politically correct calls to have women, African-Americans, Latinos, gays and lesbians, or people with disabilities represented, and their issues addressed, in all movement gatherings, have produced only bickering and hand wringing, and no significant left electoral activity since the 1960s. Reduced to "rearguard damage control" in which each fragmented group tries to defend its own turf, the American left has been "mired for the past decade in the self-defeating morass of identity politics."

In his recent book *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, Todd Gitlin similarly bemoans what he regards as nearly three decades of wasted effort on the left. According to Gitlin, political movements beginning in the late 1960s that asserted the specificity of gender or race oppression and the need to attend to these specificities to combat oppression, were "a very bad turn, a detour into quicksand." While African-Americans, women, gays, and Latinos all legitimately complain about exclusion and discrimination, the emergence of group-based political enclaves has eroded the unified left's commitment to equality and its ability to organize Americans against capitalist greed and misery. Proponents of a politics of difference insist that individuals are no more than their labels, and elevate diversity to religious heights. Identity politics leads to a spiral of multiplied identities, to essentialist definitions of the group that suppress differences within, to the comforts of enclosed marginality, to a relativism in which no claims to truth and rightness have meaning, and finally to backlash. The only hope for a renewed left is

the transcendence of difference—a common battle for a decent life for all.

Have there been mistakes and excesses within and among the movements attending to group difference? Without a doubt. People within these movements have been among the first to criticize tendencies toward “essentialism” that marginalize some people and wrongly polarize individuals and groups. It only further confuses a project of progressive alliance, however, to judge much of the thought and action of committed progressives for the last twenty years as One Big Mistake.

Left critics of the politics of difference have their history wrong, I want to argue, when they claim that public attention to group specificity has led to increasing division among Americans and a paralysis of political action. American society certainly needs a progressive movement of those with no interest in enlarging corporate power, a broad movement of working and poor people that crosses gender, race, citizenship status, sexuality, and age. An inclusive movement cannot emerge from the search for a common good, however, but only from careful attention by each vulnerable social segment to the specific experience and vulnerabilities of the others.

Increased Understanding, Not Increased Polarization

The left’s historical revisionism about the politics of difference is almost as seriously distorting as the right’s. Gitlin’s account suggests, for example, that so-called identity politics has led to an increasing “hardening of the boundaries between groups” in the last twenty-five years. A more sensitive appraisal of the history of these movements since the 1960s would, I think, find an initial hardening of boundaries, followed by a reflective questioning of boundaries, and then increasing interaction, fusion, and exchange.

Gender, race, ethnic, and ablement-specific movements arose in the late sixties and early seventies as people in the larger left reflected on their own specific experience of oppression. Each group developed an analysis of the structural workings of its own oppression or exclusion. Each had to struggle to have this analysis

taken seriously by the others, and by a left smugly convinced that all other oppressions could be reduced to that of the universal working class. Feminists struggled with labor organizations, socialist groupings, Black Power leaders, and American Indian activists to persuade them not only to take women’s issues seriously, but to change their internal practices to include women as speakers and leaders. People of color struggled with feminists, socialists, and labor leaders to have racism taken seriously, and gays and lesbians struggled with all these movements even to be recognized as part of them, let alone to have their own oppression taken seriously.

The “hardening” of group boundaries was born from the frustrations of dismissal and the more-oppressed-than-thou competition. They needed separate organizational and cultural space to withdraw from such arguments, develop solidarity with one another, and create alternative institutions to organize and provide services to their constituencies. We have forgotten, perhaps, how much work it took for each of these social movements to acknowledge the others as important, and for more traditional left organizations to regard any of them as important enough to change their own analyses and practices.

In the 1970s each of these movements did champion a “politics of identity.” Each aimed to construct or recover a core set of experiences, values, and forms of community that specifically defined women, or African-Americans, or Chicanos, and so on. From the beginning, however, identity politics was unstable, and its project was toppled by the force of the movements themselves. We did not need to wait for a Weinstein or Gitlin to recognize that group identity can be wrongly essentialist and therefore exclusionary; movement activists said this to themselves and each other by the late 1970s and early 1980s. Working-class women challenged the class bias in feminist definitions of women’s experience, African-American gay men challenged the black movement’s definition of manhood, and so on. The result has been an irresolvable tension between the recognition of the generalities of social position and the affirmation of the multiple positionings of each particular person.

Today, I would assert, these group-specific political tendencies draw less rigid boundaries around themselves than they did twenty years ago, and recognize a wider range of internal differences. This history leads me to claim that "politics of identity" is today largely a misnomer. In the meantime, the labor movement and more traditional left organizations have recognized the specificity of gender, race, and sexual oppressions, and modified their analyses and programs accordingly. The text of the founding principles of the Labor party adopted in Cleveland in June 1996 would have been unlikely for a group of labor activists in 1970.

Electoral Politics and Difference

I am not so sure that the electoral arena is the only or best place to assess the strength or weakness of left influence on U.S. politics. This is the measure that Weinstein and other left critics of the politics of difference use, however, and then they get their history wrong in claiming that this politics has meant impotence in the electoral arena. The decade of the 1970s saw some electoral success for African-Americans, but otherwise there was little significant activity bringing progressives and leftists together. The Citizens party was an important experiment, abandoned by left organizations who decided, mistakenly in my opinion, to work within the Democratic party instead. But by the early 1980s it was possible for the diverse groupings of old and new leftists, environmentalists, feminists, African-American activists, and other progressives who had persuaded one another of the importance of their issues to come together. In the decade of the 1980s this formation was called the Rainbow Coalition.

People associate this name so closely with Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns that they fail to credit the earlier campaigns for which the concept was invented. The first Rainbow Coalition formed in 1983 in Boston to try to win the Democratic party mayoral nomination for Mel King. The coalition included African-Americans, Latinos, white labor leaders, leftists and progressives, feminists, and gay activists. Although King did not win the primary, he showed much more strength than the pundits

predicted, proving to many that out-front left-wing positions could win significant numbers of votes. The Harold Washington campaign in Chicago learned from this near success, brought together a similar coalition of groups, and in November 1983 elected the first black mayor of Chicago under the Rainbow Coalition banner.

In retrospect, I look upon the 1984 Jackson presidential campaign as a trial run for the next one. Both Jackson and the campaign made many mistakes, some of them shameful, and there was not enough real grassroots organizing to reach the diverse constituencies needed for electoral success. This had changed by 1988. A genuine coalition of hardworking African-Americans, labor activists, environmentalists, farm activists, Latinos, Native Americans, feminists, socialists, and gay and lesbian activists fueled a blazing primary campaign. The Jackson message concentrated on issues of economic hardship and inequality, but also named the specific oppressions of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Jackson won seven million popular votes in 1988, more than the primary victor Walter Mondale had won four years earlier. By any measure, this was one of the most significant progressive electoral campaigns since World War II.

This was only eight years ago. We must be careful not to interpret all roads as leading to the reactionary political field in which we find ourselves today. There remain other fields in this treacherous political terrain, and some roads not taken far enough. The Rainbow movement had many problems. Chief among them were leaders afraid of the grassroots and an ultimate commitment to the Democratic party. But the Rainbow really was a coalition of constituencies differentiated by social position and experience of oppression and disadvantage, where each recognized and affirmed the specificity of the others and the need to work together.

This history falsifies Weinstein's claim that there has been no significant left electoral activity because the particularist social movements have hopelessly paralyzed us. The ideas and politics of the Rainbow Coalition had significant appeal with the American public. To be sure, the mass interest it elicited is partly attributable to its being a primary campaign with

significant media attention. But I contend that its appeal also derived from its diversity—and from the fact that the different parts of the coalition organized their distinct constituencies. The coalition was possible precisely because the different groups had gotten beyond an identity politics in which each is worried only about its own situation. Any future left-wing electoral movement will have to assemble a similar coalition of groups and encourage a similar mutual recognition.

Beating Back Backlash

It's commonly said that recent social movements have further polarized American life because they have motivated backlash. Many people claim, for example, that America is more racially polarized today than it was during the civil rights era, and blame assertive movements of African-Americans or Native Americans or Latinos who claim equal economic opportunity and full political participation at the same time as they assert cultural affinity and reject assimilation. There is no doubt that the last twenty years has seen backlash on many fronts, and increasing organization among people who would reverse the reforms of the sixties and seventies, and even of the thirties. To a significant degree, however, this is a sign of the success of progressive movements, rather than the failure of a fragmented left. Conservatives attack affirmative action, for example, partly because its principles are now embodied in the practice of many corporations and nonprofit institutions, and not only in the public programs conservatives wish to end. Even the most Orwellian imagination would not have dreamt of a Defense of Marriage Act in 1975, because the idea that gay men and lesbians might have the same privileges as heterosexual couples was unthinkable in mainstream America then. If it is not unthinkable today, that is because the movement for gay and lesbian rights has succeeded in changing many people and institutions.

Conservatives today have set their well-organized, well-funded sights not only on reversing the gains of identity politics, however, but also on targets the left has regarded as strictly class matters, such as the welfare safety net and

labor's ability to organize and bargain. Gitlin and others suggest that identity politics is at least partly responsible for these attacks on labor and the poor, because in their quest for cultural self-realization groups abandon concern for nuts-and-bolts material issues. But this is absurdly false. One of the most important organized responses to the recent welfare cuts, for example, has come from feminists. It may be true, as Weinstein says, that too much of their energy has been directed to such "rearguard damage control." It would seem more appropriate to praise them for recognizing the damage, however, than to hold their woman-centered politics responsible for relegating all of us to the rearguard.

Conservatives certainly exploit gendered and racialized rhetoric as a way of diverting attention from the economic restructuring that has been hurting most Americans. Racist anti-immigrant sentiment and sexist calls for "family values" focus attention on blaming other, poor and disadvantaged people for shrinking labor markets and increasing social costs, thus setting America's working people against each other. The left should not play into this divide and conquer game by suggesting that African-American-specific, or women-specific or gay-specific or American Indian-specific or immigrant-specific issues divert attention from capitalist domination. In doing so we risk further marginalizing those who increasingly serve as scapegoats in American politics. We should reject this false dichotomy between attending to group specificity and organizing in response to the job insecurity, increased inequality, and decreased access to health care and housing that these many groups all experience in different ways.

Fragmented Left

Weinstein, Gitlin, and others are surely right that we are a long way from mass organizing on such issues today. It seems to me that there is less organization and energy directed at working for economic and social equality today than at any time since the 1950s. Progressives are certainly fragmented, but it is disingenuous to lay blame for such fragmentation on the politics of difference.

As Weinstein notes in his February *In These Times* piece, in the last few years there have been new and interesting electoral efforts that potentially include all those who wish to challenge the hegemony of corporate interests. With the exception of the Campaign for a New Tomorrow, a predominantly African-American grouping, they all seem to be the class-oriented organizations that critics of identity politics are looking for. Yet many of these groups themselves tend to be inward looking and fragmented. The Labor party has a very strong and comprehensive program, but its leaders want the party to be tied so closely to labor organizations that they have forbidden local chapters from running candidates and indeed make it difficult for persons not affiliated with labor organizations to work with them.

The New party, on the other hand, which has had a number of successes in local elections around the country, seems politically amorphous. Its publications express many generally good ideas, but its policy of sometimes supporting Democratic party candidates and its rhetorical distancing of itself from older socialist or even New Deal traditions keeps its vision elusive.

The Independent Progressive Politics Network emerged from a meeting in Atlanta last April aimed at bringing together representatives from local, state, and national organizations in the United States working on progressive politics and interested in independent political work. Dozens of organizations were represented there, but the Greens and several state independent parties were the most active participants in the National Slate of Independent Candidates that the Network coordinated in the fall. It intends not to be a party or even an organization, but only a coordinated coalition. Yet, despite some interconnections and communication, both the New party and the Labor party, two of the biggest progressive third-party efforts, have not become actively involved.

This kind of fragmentation cannot be laid at the door of so-called identity politics. The critics of the politics of difference may have something right, however, insofar as attention to the many ways that people are damaged by economic and policy decisions can make it difficult to find

priority issues around which to form coalitions. As the above examples show, however, the fragmentation of progressives seems more attributable to a free-for-all spirit than to turf defense or ideological disagreement. Perhaps we lack commitment to the work that careful coalition building requires.

Learning from Difference

Critics of the politics of difference assume that specificity in public life is necessarily only the expression of narrow and rigidly defined group interest. This inward-looking pressing of interests, according to them, is precisely why the politics of difference makes coalition unworkable. The only alternative to such divisive bickering, they suggest, is for the majority of Americans harmed by global economic restructuring and neoliberal policies to transcend their differences of culture and social position and unite under the wide banner of "people before profits." But this way of putting things poses alternatives too starkly. There is a third way between interest-group competition and a difference-bracketing commonality. This would require a coalition that draws on particular experiences and perspectives to construct an enlarged understanding of the depth of society's injustices and the existing possibilities for addressing them. America is a big and complex society whose members have precious little shared experience other than what appears on their television screens. Only by listening to the voices of differently situated groups can a potential movement united for the sake of meeting people's needs have a clear sense of what those needs are.

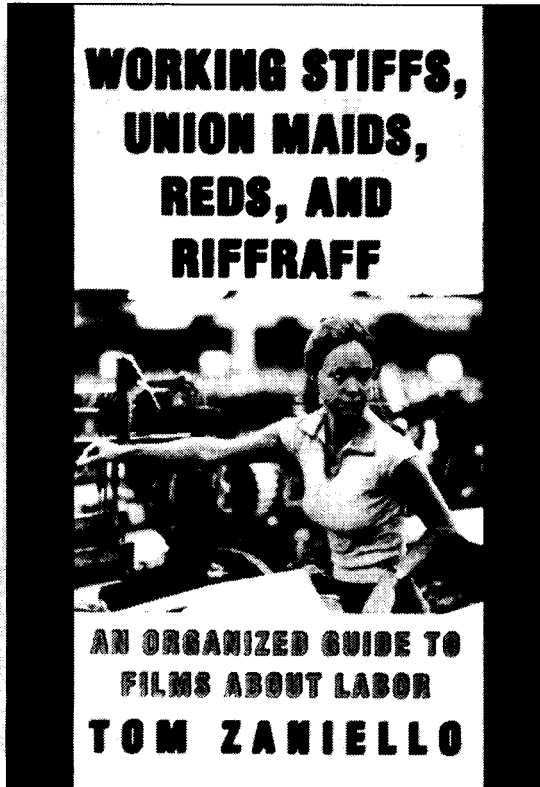
Despite the dominant rhetoric in this country that depicts poor people as a group of lazy and irresponsible black single mothers, the real circumstances of poverty are variable, and analyses from social-group perspectives are important for understanding that variability. Latino and Asian movements and groups can explain and interpret one face of poverty, feminist analysis shows another, a rural perspective another, African-American experience of racist exclusion another, reservation Indians another, older working-class white men in the former in-

dustrial heartland yet another. If each of these constituencies does not communicate its specific situations to the others, then the ruling powers can continue to coopt one by using another as scapegoat.

Similar reasoning applies to that quintessential class issue, decent jobs at decent pay. Contemporary economic restructuring surely has made good jobs more scarce, and forced many people out of work, or into low-paying jobs, or into two jobs. In this general respect many people have reason to unite behind programs for economic security and meaningful work. A comprehensive program for work and income, however, needs to develop its specifics from knowledge of the structurally different situation of people with respect to their abilities, proximity to employment, and the demands of their everyday lives: from young inner-city African-American men, to newly arrived legal or illegal immigrants, to low-skilled single mothers with little access

to child care, to suburban married women with young children and large mortgages, to able-bodied old people with small or non-existent pensions, to people who move in wheelchairs. Although jobs matter to each of these groups, their job needs are different, the constraints on their lives are different, and these differences are structured by racist, sexist, ageist and ableist biases and privileges, as well as by class and education. Ignoring such differences risks reproducing the old left's marginalization of important segments of the working class.

Unity and understanding for a new people's movement will not come from pretending that group differences do not matter, but rather from understanding precisely how they do matter, and so forging an inclusive picture of our social relations. We need to wake up to the challenge of understanding across difference rather than keep on dreaming about common dreams. □



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FEMINISM AND THE COMMON GOOD

The California Health Care Case

Is American feminism about to become interesting again? The June 3, 1996 issue of the *New Yorker* opened with Betty Friedan's comments on the Stand for Children event in Washington, D.C. Under the subhead, "A gathering heralds a shift toward a new paradigm," Friedan marked feminists' growing awareness of the limitations of gender-based identity politics. "As a number of recent polls have made clear," she said, "the most urgent concerns of women today are not gender issues"—that is, abortion, sexual harassment, and pornography—"but jobs and families."

A week later, in the *Nation*, Martha Burk and Heidi Hartmann—both leading feminists—proposed "a recovery program for the women's movement." They cited a spring 1996 poll conducted by Lou Harris for the Feminist Majority Foundation that found 69 percent approval for the "women's movement" but only 41 percent approval for the "feminist movement." More ominous, only 24 percent of those surveyed said they would give time or money to organizations that called themselves feminist. Setting those figures alongside the declining turnout of women voters in 1994, "the rise of a virulent antiwoman Christian right and the rapid growth of right-wing women's voices in the media," Burk and Hartmann concluded that American feminism is in crisis. "We must ask ourselves," they wrote, "how women's organizations in the short space of twenty years lost political power and came to be perceived as irrelevant (or even hostile) to the common woman." Their answers: the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment, the absence of a feminist economic program, the challenge of the new conservatism, the fragmen-

tation of the women's movement by single-issue agendas, and the lulling presence of pro-choice Bill Clinton in the White House.

What is to be done? Like Friedan, Burk and Hartmann recommended that feminists start addressing the issues women say they care about most—economics, health care, and violence.

I read these pronouncements with relief. Certain critics from outside the feminist establishment have been saying some of these things for quite a while. But now prominent feminists are beginning to say it themselves: the women's movement in this country is in deep trouble, and its problems have as much to do with internal misdirection as with the hostile and powerful outside forces with which the movement has to contend. Better yet, the emerging critique broaches the crucial question, what does feminism offer "the common woman"?

Answering that question, however, will involve more than rearranging items on a list—that is, moving abortion from the top of the feminist agenda and putting "jobs and families" in its place or building a better flow chart or (as Burk and Hartmann also suggest) going online with a catchy Web site. To regroup effectively, we need to figure out how American feminism has lost touch with so many of its prospective constituents and why it has not inspired a broad-based movement for justice.

The following pages consider a recent, particularly instructive episode in which the National Organization for Women (NOW) and other pro-choice women's organizations helped to defeat an initiative for publicly accountable, universal health care—the California Health Security Act, generally known as Proposition

186, which appeared on the November 1994 California ballot. The story revolves around issues that should be at the center of the coming debate over how to rebuild American feminism, and for that matter, American democracy.

Proposition 186 attempted to bring Canadian-style, "single-payer" health care to California. If it had passed, Californians would now pay their doctors and other medical providers through one agency, run by the state government—thus the term "single-payer"—rather than through the myriad private insurance companies that ostensibly facilitate the provision of health care in this country. Instead of being tied to employment, health insurance would be available to all Californians, whether or not they had jobs. Medicine would be regulated, but not owned, by the state government, with rates set by an elected health commissioner. Physicians would be free to practice medicine in the setting of their choice, and patients free to choose their doctors. The whole system would be financed through taxes on personal income and businesses.

Single-payer health care came to Canada in 1947, when the provincial government of Saskatchewan introduced hospital coverage, making it the first universal public health insurance program in North America. In the next twenty-five years, province after province adopted public systems of hospital coverage and medical coverage as well. By 1972, with the support of federal legislation, the single-payer model was in place throughout the country.

A 1990 Lou Harris survey of residents of ten nations (Canada, the United States, the Netherlands, Great Britain, West Germany, Italy, France, Sweden, Australia, and Japan) found that Canadians were the most and Americans the least satisfied with their health care system: 43 percent of the Canadians wanted to see major changes, compared to 89 percent of the Americans. When in 1990 a *Los Angeles Times* poll asked Americans if they favored a national health plan similar to Canada's, 67 percent said yes. No wonder: by then, thirty-seven million Americans lacked health insurance of any sort. Meanwhile, the red tape necessitated by having

fifteen hundred different American health insurers was choking the national economy. In 1994, the U.S. Accounting Office reported the United States could save \$67 billion in administrative costs by moving to a single-payer system.

Nevertheless, the Canadian national health program has been almost universally dismissed (when it has not simply been ignored) in the American media. The single-payer option was rejected out of hand by the Clintons, whose proposal for health care reform was closer to the corporate agenda of the Democratic Leadership Council. In Congress, however, Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone and Washington Representative Jim McDermott presented a single-payer plan that was eventually supported by ninety members of the House. And in California there was Proposition 186, placed on the November 1994 ballot by over a million signatures.

One might have expected women's organizations to endorse Prop. 186 with enthusiasm. According to a 1993 study conducted by the California Elected Women's Association for Education and Research, in 1989 at least 1.7 million, or 17 percent, of California women ages 18-64 had no health insurance of any sort. According to this report, these numbers could only be estimated because data on the health insurance coverage of California women is neither systematically collected nor routinely published. Were such data available, we would want it to tell us how many insured women obtained their coverage directly—that is, through their own jobs—and how many got it through their husbands, a crucial statistic in a time when half of all marriages end in divorce. We would also want to know how many California women were *underinsured* and why. And finally, even with these figures at hand, we would want to remind ourselves that all insurance based in employment is only as secure as a person's job—hardly a reassuring proposition in a downsizing corporate economy.

With such considerations in mind, women's organizations did indeed endorse Prop. 186. By summer 1994, California NOW, the League of Women Voters, the Older Women's League, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom had all signed on. But in August, Cali-

fornia NOW withdrew its endorsement. And in September the National Women's Political Caucus-Los Angeles (NWPC-L.A.) declared its outright opposition.

These developments did not go unnoticed by the anti-186 forces. In an October 5 press release, Kirk West, president of the California State Chamber of Commerce and chair of Taxpayers Against the Government Takeover, called Prop. 186 so "extremist" an approach to health care reform "that it offends those who normally do not ally themselves with business groups in political battles." Among the groups whose "participation in our campaign" West welcomed were two unlikely political bedfellows—the California Catholic Conference and NWPC-L.A. The No on 186 press release also noted that the National Organization for Women had repealed its endorsement of the initiative. The implication was clear: if both the Catholic Church and pro-choice women opposed this measure, who could possibly support it?

Two days later, the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran an article under the arresting if inaccurate headline "Bishops, NOW Oppose Proposition 186" (as the anti-186 press release had noted, the bishops opposed the measure, while California NOW replaced its initial support with a neutral stand). The article cited Catherine Dodd, "Yes on 186" spokeswoman and former president of the San Francisco NOW chapter, as saying that "she had warned NOW leadership that their position would be 'used by the opposition.'" For confirmation of Dodd's fears, one needed to look no further than the *Chronicle* headline.

A month later, Prop. 186 was crushed at the polls, winning only 27 percent of the vote. It would be foolish to ascribe that loss to the lack of support from California NOW, NWPC-L.A., and other women's organizations (for example, the California Abortion Rights Action League and the National Latina Health Organization); but it would not be at all foolish to wonder what this episode tells us about the current political quandary of the women's movement.

California feminists who did not support Proposition 186 charge that the initiative failed

to protect reproductive rights. The word "abortion," they note, appeared nowhere in the text of the California Health Security Act. Though Article 2, Medical Benefits, stated that "all medical care determined to be medically appropriate by the patient's health care provider" would be covered, the closest the document came to mentioning reproductive rights was to specify coverage for "prenatal, perinatal, and maternity care." For the pro-choice community, that was not close enough. "It was left ambiguous . . . for political reasons—so that 186 did not become an abortion platform," says Helen Grieco, public relations coordinator for California NOW. "They thought that by not raising the issue," Claudette Begin of East Bay NOW told me, "it would not be an issue."

That is exactly what the 186 leadership hoped. "Basically, we did not want the initiative to become a forum for the abortion/anti-abortion debate," says Oakland attorney and health care activist Steve Schear, one of the drafters of Prop. 186. "We wanted to focus on expanding health insurance coverage." That narrow focus was further dictated by a second strategic consideration. The California Constitution has a "single-subject rule" that forbids an initiative to take up more than one issue. "Because there are no standards as to what constitutes a single subject," explains Karl Mannheim, the Loyola University law professor who advised the authors of 186 when they were drawing up the initiative, "the courts pretty much do what they want. If the judges don't like the initiative, then they can strike it from the ballot, and it won't get presented to the voters." Striving to avoid legal and political challenges, the authors of 186 tried hard to skirt the abortion controversy.

The strategy was a legal success and a political flop. No legal challenges appeared. But both pro-choice activists and the Catholic bishops objected to Prop. 186's ambiguity about reproductive rights. The bishops applauded the single-payer model, but drew back over what they saw as the implicit endorsement of abortion. In a press release issued in late August 1994, the California Catholic Conference said, "Our legal analysis indicates that there is nothing in the initiative itself that would alter exist-

ing law on abortion or any other life-related issue”—a position that the bishops found unacceptable, since existing federal and California law protects a woman's right to abortion.

The pro-choice activists came to the opposite conclusion. In their reading, the initiative's silence on abortion would expose reproductive rights to new assaults. As California NOW spokeswoman Helen Grieco puts it, "The California Constitution supposedly protects funding for health care services," including abortion. "That is in black and white, and we have to fight for it. What do you think is going to happen if it's ambiguous?" Grieco thinks she knows: "It would have diminished abortion rights in California." For her, that prospect was decisive. "Health care," she says, "means jack-shit to me if women can't get an abortion."

Like the bishops, then, but for a different reason, these pro-choice activists embraced the single-payer model even as they rejected the initiative itself. "Of course we want to revolutionize the health care system," says Grieco, "but we're not going to do it on the backs of women."

Nor, said NOW members, would they do it on the backs of other disfranchised people, such as illegal immigrants. For Grieco and other pro-choice feminists held that despite its claims to provide universal coverage, Prop. 186 would have denied health care to noncitizens. The arguments in favor of Prop. 186 that appeared in the official *Voter's Handbook* designated "legal" California residents as the proposed health care system's rightful beneficiaries. Members of the 186 leadership justify that restrictive designation on the same grounds that they defend the initiative's silence on abortion: once again, they hoped to avoid drawing onto Prop. 186 the wrath of highly mobilized political forces, in this case the forces rallying around the very next item on the November 1994 ballot, the infamous anti-immigrant Proposition 187; and, once again, they also sought to deter legal challenges that might have been brought against Prop. 186 for violating the single-subject rule, in this case by attempting to redefine not only health care insurance but also legal residency in California.

And once again, pro-choice feminists rejected the tactics of the single-payer leadership.

They saw the specification of legal California residents in the *Voters Handbook* as a sop thrown to supporters of Prop. 187, a gesture they found highly offensive. "We do not believe people who can vote have more rights than people who cannot vote," says Caryn Brooks, a member of East Bay NOW's Board of Directors. "A campaign that bashes immigrants is not a campaign that NOW can support," given the organization's commitment to solidarity and justice.* "We were being asked to choose between one group's rights and another's," says Elizabeth Toledo, Statewide Coordinator for California NOW. It was a choice that California NOW declined.

Toledo and other feminists had a further problem with the 186 campaign, one that did not show up in the text of the initiative or the arguments in the *Voters Handbook*: the scorn with which, they report, they were treated by the 186 leadership. "We were disrespected," says Toledo. "[The single-payer campaign] could not point to any advocate of the reproductive rights community who had been asked to help formulate the initiative." The measure was presented to women's organizations as a *fait accompli*. "They assumed that certain people would be on their side," says Caryn Brooks. She and other feminists deemed that assumption insulting. "We're not going to stand in line," says Helen Grieco—and they didn't.

Feminist concerns about Prop. 186 were not minor: the campaign dodged the abortion issue, defaulted on the coverage of illegal immigrants, and treated the feminist community with arrogance. Yet these grievances would have seemed more substantial if other Californians with deep commitments to abortion and immigrant rights hadn't backed the single-payer initiative.

Take, for example, Dr. Barbara Newman, a family-practice physician in San Francisco. At the time of the 186 campaign, Newman chaired the California Physicians Alliance, the state chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program. She also belonged to the top echelon of

*Despite such strictures, the East Bay NOW Board of Directors urged its members to work for Prop. 186 even after California NOW had withdrawn its endorsement of the initiative.

the 186 leadership, sitting on the campaign's executive committee. In that capacity, she was privy to intense debates over the initiative's position on abortion and noncitizens.

Like the refractory feminists, Newman was unhappy that Prop. 186 did not explicitly provide for reproductive rights and for undocumented immigrants. And she, too, was dismayed by the single-payer campaign's condescension toward women—so dismayed that after the election she wrote an article blasting the “five white guys in Berkeley” who, she said, ran the campaign and discounted anyone who (like herself) “refused to jump on the testosterone-driven bandwagon of winning at all costs.”

But unlike the pro-choice dissidents, Newman stayed with the 186 campaign because she believed that the merits of the California Health Security Act far outweighed its faults. In her opinion, moreover, those merits included provisions for abortion and universal coverage. Prop. 186 guaranteed reproductive rights, says Newman, because “all medical services deemed necessary by the provider of the patient's choice” were “definitely written in.” So, too, were various expedients “hidden in the initiative” which “we felt meant that in reality everybody's health care would be paid for, regardless of their citizenship status.” For example, 186 specified that “anyone who walked in with a medical emergency would be treated . . . Plus, it's a federal law that you cannot turn anyone away from an emergency facility if they're ill.” In addition, a public health budget earmarked large amounts of money for preventive care, including, says Newman, “immunizations and Pap smears and prenatal care,” services that “were to be paid for to the extent that they were needed to preserve the health of the community.” Public clinics and hospitals were to be funded by annual global budgets based on the number of patients to be served, their legal status notwithstanding. “So there were all these little ways,” Newman concludes, that Prop. 186 covered reproductive rights and non-citizens after all.

On the abortion issue, Newman's claims are substantiated by Margaret Crosby, staff attorney and reproductive rights specialist for the American Civil Liberties Union-Northern Cali-

fornia. The initiative process, Crosby stresses, is inherently ambiguous, especially compared with its legislative equivalent. “Could a lawyer looking hard at 186 craft an argument that abortion is not covered?” Crosby asks. “I'd say yes.” But after having reviewed the text of the California Health Security Act and the ballot arguments, Crosby says her “bottom line” is “that the more reasonable interpretation of 186 was that abortion is covered.” The initiative, she notes, shared a structure with Medicaid, under whose aegis women now obtain publicly funded abortions in California. Like Prop. 186, the legislation enabling Medicaid does not specify abortion coverage, but states that all in-patient health-care services will be provided for. Furthermore, Crosby says, an interpretation of Prop. 186 that excluded abortion would have made the initiative unconstitutional—just the sort of “drastic act” that courts try to avoid.

Immigrant rights activists came to endorse Prop. 186 via a somewhat different route. Studying the *Voters Handbook*, they saw nothing ambiguous about the single-payer campaign's exclusion of undocumented workers. Representatives from the Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights and the National Lawyers Guild's Los Angeles and California chapters had failed to convince the 186 leadership to make coverage universal or at least to shroud the issue in ambiguity. Nevertheless, these groups all backed the measure. “Although our position did not prevail,” says Riva Enteen, program director for the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of the Guild, “we continued to support the campaign because of the urgency of improving health care coverage in this state.”

In the end, this was the argument that overrode concerns about abortion and immigrant rights: publicly accountable health insurance would immensely benefit most Californians. One pro-choice activist who had no trouble making that case was Gretchen Mackler, an East Bay teacher and trade unionist. Mackler joined NOW because she passionately supports abortion rights. “When I see Operation Rescue come to town,” she says, “I'm up at five o'clock in the morning, on the network.” It was Mackler who introduced the motion to support 186 at the California NOW state convention in May 1993,

and who lobbied hard to get it passed at that meeting. She was dumbfounded by the resistance to the single-payer initiative that she encountered in the organization's highest ranks. "I felt the leadership of the state NOW was looking for every possible excuse to abstain from this struggle," says Mackler, "and I just found that very strange, because I've watched NOW bend the rules all over the place to support what they thought was in their interest and not support what they don't feel is in their interest. This thing, to me, was just blaring in the face in our interest. It had to do with—what is it?—seven or eight million people in the state of California who have no health care? I mean, no sense of compassion—here are people out there needing health care and these guys in Sacramento are dicking around—well, it doesn't say this, it doesn't say that. Jesus Christ, give me a break. What are you waiting for?"

What was the NOW leadership—and indeed, the rest of the pro-choice community—waiting for?

Feminist concerns about abortion and immigrant rights could arguably have been overcome. What couldn't be surmounted were differences in political vision and strategy. When California NOW public relations coordinator Helen Grieco vows, "We're going to say the A-word, and we're not backing down," she enunciates a confrontational sort of politics that radically diverges from the oblique approach taken by the single-payer movement. "You go in, you don't compromise, you put your cards on the table, and when you win," says Grieco, "you win." But winning is not as important as putting your cards on the table.

In the vernacular of the sixties, you speak truth to power. That truth is first and foremost the speaker's—rooted in her deep personal experience—and a crucial function of politics is to validate that experience by providing a public forum within which it can be articulated and confirmed. The urgency of the speaker's need for personal recognition becomes clear when such recognition is denied. "We had a lot of anger," says California NOW coordinator Elizabeth Toledo, describing the pro-choice community's re-

action to the supercilious behavior of the 186 leadership. And in determining California NOW's position on the single-payer initiative, that anger counted as much as public policy.

This style, the in-your-face style of identity politics, could not be reconciled with the strategy adopted by the single-payer campaign. Prop. 186 co-author Dr. Vishu Lingappa, a physician on the faculty of the School of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, poses the alternatives: "What is my goal in entering a particular political debate? If it's to stake out the particular idealized political position I believe in, that's one thing"—and not the thing he and the rest of the single-payer leadership sought. "If you're going to go into initiative politics," says Lingappa, "you're looking for an island of common ground among people who otherwise might not agree on anything." If such a search is to be successful, the disagreements among the otherwise differing, hoped-for constituents must be downplayed. And that means that you do not put all your cards on the table. Lingappa shrugs off the feminists' criticism that the single-payer initiative was evasive or even dishonest: "If their contention is that 186 did not confront people on issues it did not have to confront them on, they're right." Given the current state of American politics, "You cannot come out and say what you really believe, and win. But you can find a way that does not compromise your position and still enables you to find common ground and win."

The common ground staked out by Prop. 186, assured quality health care for millions of Californians, was ultimately invisible to the pro-choice activists. To blame their impaired vision on identity politics alone, however, is probably a mistake. Consider the following possibility: that it was not "the noisy gals"—as one NOW activist termed herself and her militant sisters—who ultimately turned the tide against the single-payer initiative, but representatives of another strain in the women's movement: feminists with close ties to the Democratic Party of Bill Clinton.

Some members of NOW and NWPC-L.A. say that a decisive factor during the final endorsement meetings of their organizations was the opposition to 186 voiced by a lawyer from Southern California named Lisa Specht. Specht,

who did not respond to my repeated requests for an interview, works for the Los Angeles law firm of former chair of the Democratic party Charles Manatt. According to Christine Robert, before Specht addressed NWPC-L.A., she told Robert that the 1994 Democratic candidate for governor, Kathleen Brown, had okayed the anti-186 position. NOW activists report that Specht's arguments before California NOW's state board in August 1994 were pivotal in getting the organization to withdraw its earlier endorsement of the measure. Of course, it took more than a single lobbyist, however adroit, to achieve that result. One NOW member, requesting anonymity, put it like this: "The part of NOW's leadership that did not want to be caught opposing Clinton 'used' abortion and immigration issues to rescind the endorsement."

What kind of feminism accommodates, even sponsors, such politics? It is a feminism descended from the middle-class activists who forged the women's movement in the late sixties and early seventies. Its priorities are reflected in its formulation of women's health issues or, to speak more precisely, issue, since for a long time, there was effectively only one: abortion. In recent years, breast cancer has emerged as a second notable concern. But abortion is still far and away the top health issue for the contemporary American women's movement, in large part because the demand for reproductive rights so neatly incorporates the key motives of that movement's founding generation: the assertion of women's independence and sexuality. For American feminists, this double affirmation remains an article of faith.

But central as it has been to the contemporary women's movement, abortion addresses only a fraction of most women's health concerns. It says nothing about the needs of women who are too old to bear children. Nor does it speak directly to the interests of women who currently care for children, or for parents or siblings or a husband—in a word, women with family commitments. The struggle for reproductive rights focuses on an essential but only partial aspect of the female self, a woman's desire to control her body and her sexuality.

Because that desire resonates with the time-honored American values of freedom and indi-

vidualism, abortion is supported by a majority of Americans. But for all its ideological potency, abortion can never be the basis of an encompassing feminist movement, much less a powerful movement dedicated to justice of all kinds; it simply leaves out too much. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese made this point a few years ago when she argued that "women's needs cannot be defended in the name of atomistic individualistic principles. They must be fought for in the name of social justice for all—not individuals viewed as so many atoms, but individuals viewed as responsible and interdependent members of society, from which their rights derive." Rights guarantee individuals the real options without which the notion of personal responsibility is a cruel farce. A just society offers its members—all its members—meaningful choices.

In recent decades, American feminists have not spoken much about creating such a society. Instead, they have emphasized personal liberation and advancement. As Fox-Genovese insisted, we need to press that category and ask, liberation for whom and into what? For the middle-class women who first articulated this program in the late sixties, the galvanizing answer was liberation from women's customary domestic obligations into the still-exotic male world of work and achievement. For middle-class feminists' less privileged sisters, Fox-Genovese pointed out, the alternative to the family was far less alluring; with luck, it meant a poorly paid, dead-end job. Today, as decent work is harder than ever to find, as family and neighborhood ties continue to unravel, and individuals are more and more at the mercy of huge impersonal institutions—be they agents of corporate capital or agencies of the state—the limitations of this kind of feminism have become clear.

Granted, the feminist agenda of the nineties, with its solicitude for welfare recipients, looks beyond the middle class. But when measured against the standard of social justice for all, welfare reform is highly problematic. Unless it is accompanied by serious demands for the creation of decent jobs, strengthening the welfare system reinforces the class divisions that in the past few decades have dangerously weakened the foundations of American democracy.

Such demands have not been forthcoming from the women's movement. When it comes to equity in the workplace, feminists have mainly focused on affirmative action. And affirmative action plus welfare rights equals precisely the kind of social program that the policy makers of a class-divided society such as ours could be expected to devise: the members of the professional elite get a shot at success defined as mobility; the rest have to settle for surveillance and bare subsistence.

Currently advanced by the most prominent American feminist organizations, this program needs to be evaluated not only as a vehicle of women's concerns but also as a strategic basis for fighting the right, especially since these days the injunction to "Fight the Right" seems to lead off every feminist appeal. So it needs to be said: as a strategic basis for fighting the right, the prevailing feminist program lacks one indispensable component—an inclusive vision of democracy.

In a wonderfully lucid piece that appeared in the *Nation* in January 1996, Jane Haddam reported that her precariously middle-class Connecticut neighbors hate welfare, but not for the reasons usually trotted out by the media. "The problem most middle-class Americans have with the American welfare state," wrote Haddam, "isn't that it supports the 'underclass.' It's that it *doesn't support anyone else*" [italics in original]. If you're a woman holding down two service jobs at the minimum wage, as is your husband (assuming you have one), why, she asked, are you "supposed to vote in favor of paying higher taxes to provide the poor with medical insurance and child care that you will not be able to afford yourself?" No wonder most Americans resent this kind of paternalism.

Haddam laid out the alternative: the kind of social welfare practiced by the social democracies of Western Europe—and minimally present even in this country. "Americans," Haddam observes, "have been generally well disposed to real welfare state provisions—those that aren't means tested, [and] so apply equally to everyone—where they have been instituted"—notably, Social Security and public schools. Because they are designed to serve everyone, these institutions have escaped the stigma now attached

to welfare (though in certain cities and neighborhoods this is less and less true for public schools). They need to be fortified by massive infusions of money and talent, and complemented by the creation of programs like public universal health insurance. Vigorous support of such institutions will be part of any feminist agenda that seeks to foster what Michael Tomasky calls "a more majoritarian politics." The idea isn't necessarily to win—though that wouldn't be such a bad thing—but at the very least to put forward the vision of a common culture. As both Tomasky and Todd Gitlin have recently argued, such a vision could provide the basis of a truly democratizing strategy.

In mid-June NOW president Patricia Ireland passed through Berkeley on a tour publicizing her new book. When I asked her to comment on the alarms that Friedan and Burk and Hartmann had raised about American feminism, she denied that there was a problem. In Ireland's words: "We are stronger than we have ever been; I disagree vigorously with the assessment that says the movement is anything but strong and vibrant." Back in June it was perhaps possible to ignore the signs of demoralization. Six months later it is no longer possible, at least not in California, where the November passage of Prop. 209 ended affirmative action in public contracts, education, and employment.

If the women's movement ever is to regain its strength and vibrancy, we have to grapple with the fact of its current malaise. That doesn't mean repudiating our considerable achievements. It does mean identifying the attitudes and actions that have guided American feminism to its present impasse and, as we used to say, figuring out viable alternatives. A feminism dedicated to that task could do worse than to take its slogan from the title of Jane Haddam's article, a phrase itself borrowed from one of the great enabling documents of American political life: "Promote the General Welfare." It's worth pondering the connections between that watchword and a more familiar feminist motto: "Sisterhood is powerful." □

THE SCIENCE WARS IN INDIA

What do left intellectuals do when they know that they are too marginalized to change the world? They get busy interpreting the world, of course. And interpreting how we interpret the world, and how the non-Western “Others” interpret it, and how we interpret others’ interpretations . . . and ad infinitum. The interpretive turn allows the left to create in discourse what it is unable to realize in the rough and tumble of real politics: a world where all ideologies have been deconstructed, revealed, and readied for overthrow; a world where all can live by their own lights. The inverse relationship between an explosion of high theory and a decline in political efficacy appears to be as true today as it was when Perry Anderson first observed it nearly two decades ago in his *Considerations of Western Marxism*.

What follows here is an appeal by an “Other,” in whose name many contemporary left theorists justify their interpretive turn, to think about how their epistemological egalitarianism affects the urgent task of transforming oppressive social structures and cultural values in non-Western societies. I will argue that the recent rise in political and cultural visibility of the religious right (the Bharatiya Janata party, or BJP, and its affiliates) in my native India¹ should give pause to all those academics in the West and in the third world who describe the rationality of “Western” science itself as a source of imperialism and racism.

Hindu nationalists have heeded the call for “decolonizing” science, and responded with aggressive propaganda for “Hindu ways of knowing,” which they present as the locally embedded alternative to the alien and coloniz-

ing Western science. The two examples of the right’s “Hinduization” of science and politics that I will discuss—the introduction of Vedic mathematics in public schools and the spread of “Vastu shastra” (ancient Indian material science)—do indeed meet the criteria of decolonized science advocated by left theorists: both are opposed to “Eurocentric Northern” ways of knowing; both are “situated knowledges” of non-Western people. The question I want to pose in the light of the BJP’s victory is whether such knowledge is a step forward for women, minorities, and the desperately poor in non-Western societies. Does the project of de-Westernizing science deserve the support of my fellow progressive intellectuals?

As a one-time biologist, science writer, and a partisan of science-for-the-people movements in India and in the United States, I have watched with increasing unease the transnational alliance that has emerged around the idea that the rationality of modern science encodes Western and imperialistic social-cultural values, and is therefore inimical to the interests of non-Western peoples. The alliance brings together some of the most avant-garde scholars in U.S. universities with the neopopulist, cultural-nationalist, “postcolonial” intellectuals from the third world, most notably India.

Indeed, the cluster of ideas that postmodernist intellectuals deploy to deconstruct the supposedly Eurocentric assumptions of modern science appears with high frequency in the discourse of Hindu fundamentalist parties. The Hindu right has proclaimed the twenty-first century a “Hindu century” on the theoretical grounds made respectable by left critics of sci-

ence. These reverse Orientalists who glorify whatever the Western powers devalued are walking through the door that the critics of Orientalism opened for them. The tools that deconstruct also construct.

Constructivist theories of science have cleared a discursive and political space that the nationalistic right is only too eager to move into. Indeed, the right could not have wished for a more fashionable neighborhood to pitch its own tent in. Making the content and rationality of science an epiphenomenon of the wider cultural and social structures is no doubt useful for exposing the play of power in supposedly objective accounts of the world. But when science is joined to culture at the hip in the constructivist fashion, it also opens the door to the so-called "ethno-sciences"—"Hindu science," "Islamic science," "third world women's science"—wherein scientific rationality is subordinated to the "forms of life" of different communities. When the existing social values are allowed to decide the validity of knowledge, knowledge loses whatever power it has to critique these often oppressive values. It is this deference to the existing "forms of life" that makes the project of constructing different ethno-sciences for different peoples so hospitable to all kinds of conservative social forces.

Thus, when the secular and mostly left-inclined critics claim—in the language and tone that Alan Sokal managed to feign so convincingly in his *Social Text* hoax of last year—that scientific facts cannot be judged as objectively true or false, but only from within the "regime of truth" established by social power, the religious right reads in it a justification for its demand that the validity of Hindu science be judged only on its "own terms." When the academic critics argue that scientific rationality must be subordinated to cultural instrumentalities, the religious right finds in it an affirmation of its own cultural chauvinism. One cannot avoid a shock of recognition when one reads, for instance, the BJP's recent *Humanistic Approach to Economic Development*, which insists that the cultural ethos of the Hindu *Rashtra* (nation) must become "a light unto itself," and have the final authority over what aspects of "foreign" science and technology are admitted into

schools and other institutions. Hasn't one encountered similar appeals for integration of values and politics in knowledge-seeking activities in more academic, self-described "progressive" critiques of science? If the critics see science as a dystopian, arrogant and "God's-eye view of the world," supposedly transcending the material lives and beliefs of people, the BJP is only too happy to offer a supposedly humbler and more situated "Mother India's view of the world." If, as the critics charge, the very logic of modern science is a cultural expression of a Western "will to power," then the Hindu nationalists justifiably consider it their patriotic duty to resist modern science, and to replace it with ways of knowing informed by the imagined Hindu values of holism, communitarianism, and androgyny. Interestingly, the ruthlessness with which the critics interrogate "Western" science is matched in intensity only by their charity and solicitousness toward non-Western, pre-scientific ways of knowing.²

I do not for a moment believe, and neither should I be read as claiming, that the cultural critics of science knowingly speak for the Hindu right. In fact, both from personal association and from their written works, I know these critics to be motivated by deeply egalitarian, radically democratic, and staunchly antiracist sentiments. I know that they have no sympathy whatsoever for the anti-Muslim and anti-Christian platform of the Hindu right. But their personal politics and good intentions are not the issue here. What is an issue is the unintended impact of their theories on the lives of distant strangers. It is time the left critics of science ask: why is it that the religious right in India (and to a far more dangerous extent in Islamic countries) has been able to appropriate the theoretical language and conclusions of their intellectual labors? Isn't this appropriation reason enough to rethink some of their basic assumptions regarding science as social "all the way down"?

What fuels the antipathy of science critics toward those who wish to defend the traditional virtues of scientific realism, including the idea that although not free from cultural biases, scientific reasoning does incrementally lead to

knowledge that corresponds to the actual state of affairs in the world? There was a time, not so long ago, when popularizing science was considered a progressive cause, and science was seen as a weapon against ancestral authority. (The flowering of a vigorous people's science movement in India through the seventies and the eighties, which openly advocated "Western" science for social revolution, motivated me to give up a career in biotechnology and become a science popularizer instead.) How has the left become so alienated from the institutional practices of natural science that it can find no use for them, in their present form, for progressive politics?

Limiting myself only to the recent battles in the "science wars," I believe I have a rough diagnosis of the left's disenchantment with science. The key word of my diagnosis is "empathy." As even a cursory reading of their work will show, the left academics who defend some variant of cultural relativism as "liberatory" believe that claims of universality of modern science prevent Westerners from fully empathizing with the moral and cognitive logics of others. Andrew Ross, for instance, seems to believe that supporting popular beliefs, say, in alternative medicine (his example) is a sign of "democratization from below," while those who demand that the popular beliefs be scientifically tested are elitist. According to Ross, only when we attenuate the claims of empirical rationality—and recognize "different ways of doing science, ways that downgrade methodology, experiment, and manufacturing in favor of local environments, cultural values, and principles of social justice"—can we begin to move toward true diversity of knowledge systems.³

Sandra Harding extends the empathy argument to non-Western "Others" when she claims that modern science is an "ethnoscience" of the West, with no more global purchase than any other culturally specific, local knowledge system. Because the West's ethnoscience has been molded on the twin templates of capitalist greed and imperialist expansion, she believes that it is "incapable of producing the kinds of knowledge needed for sustainable human life under democratic conditions," especially in societies with different natural and social orders. The

need to empathize with other cultures in a multicultural world, Harding insists, requires that we give up the dream of a "one true science," and begin to live with a "borderland epistemology"—an epistemology that "values the distinctive understandings of nature that different cultures have resources to generate." Knowers in different cultures can pick and choose sciences and combine them in a "knowledge collage" that serves whatever particular goal might be of interest to them at any given time. Thus, in Harding's "borderlands," the appropriation of modern science by other cultures can only be defended for pragmatic or political reasons, not on epistemological grounds.⁴

For Harding, as for many other advocates of multicultural science, the impulse to empathize with non-Western "Others" requires that knowledge systems not be rank-ordered in terms of better or worse accounts of reality. They are "different" accounts that different social orders produce in order to cope with their culture- and language-bound perceptions of reality. And yet, cultural critics of science continue to deny that they have erased the line between science and nonscience. Such denials are surprising, for it has been shown many times over that *any* account of knowledge that makes the standards of validity (for example, logic, experiment, and evidence) internal to a culturally conditioned consensus cannot escape epistemological and judgmental relativism. But constructionists simply refuse to play ball with philosophers—one more symptom, I presume, of the skepticism toward all abstractions that has come to define the post-all academy.

No doubt this empathy with the long-oppressed Others is liberatory for Western outsiders. But I contend that those insiders whose interest in a fuller, freer life has long been frustrated by the oppressive elements of local, "situated" knowledge—women, the "lower castes," and working people—need a richer kind of empathy that includes respect, but also critique; love, but also anger. The oppressed Others do not need patronizing affirmations of their ways of knowing, as much as they need ways to *challenge* these ways of knowing. They do not need to be told that modern science is no less of a cultural narrative than their local knowledges,

for they need the findings of modern science, *understood as transcultural truths*, in order to expose and challenge local knowledges.

I submit that the moment the Indian left began to talk the language of cultural constructionism, it lost the battle to the Hindu nationalists. Those of us associated with the people's science movements of the 1970s and the 1980s could use modern scientific knowledge to contest the dominant, largely Hindu world views on caste and women, precisely because we could claim that the content of science was not Western in any substantive way, and that it gave us a picture of the natural world that was as true for us in India as it was for anyone living anywhere on this planet. But when a small but highly influential group of Indian intellectuals, borrowing heavily from Western critics of the Enlightenment, began to argue that scientific rationality itself is a colonial construct, the people's science movements were left with no principled defense against accusations that popularization of modern science means internal colonization. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the old, bold slogans of "science for social revolution" gave way to a parochial, almost obsessive compulsion to search and destroy any contaminating traces of the Western/colonial "episteme." Correspondingly, the cosmopolitan vision of socialism and secularism gave way to communitarian fantasies of Gandhian village republics—which sound much more egalitarian than they have ever been in reality.

In this context, is it any surprise at all that the Hindu nationalists have been able to position themselves as the true defenders of non-Western ways of knowing? Themselves leading the charge for "decolonizing knowledge," what principled argument could the alliance of left-leaning and neo-Gandhian critics of modern science have offered when the Hindu fundamentalist parties began to replace modern mathematics with so-called "Vedic mathematics" in public schools? One of BJP's first acts after coming to power in the state of Uttar Pradesh in 1992 was to make the study of Vedic mathematics compulsory for high school students. Explicitly stating an interest in "awakening national pride"

among students, the government-approved textbooks replaced standard algebra and calculus with sixteen Sanskrit verses proclaimed by their author, Jagadguru Swami Shri Bharati Krishna Tirathji Maharaj, the high priest of Puri, to be of Vedic origin. Prominent Indian mathematicians and historians who have examined these verses believe that there is nothing Vedic about them, and that the Jagadguru has tried to pass off a set of clever formulas for quick computation as a piece of ancient wisdom. But that has not stopped BJP and other revivalist cultural movements in India from equating Jagadguru with Ramanujan in their hagiographies of Indian knowledge systems.

The problem with introducing supposedly indigenous and ancient knowledge is not that it is indigenous and ancient: there can, of course, be instances of ancient lore that can help us see a contemporary problem in a new light. The real issue is that the supposed Vedic mathematics, as many progressive Indian mathematicians and critics have argued, offers students mere tools for computation in place of the allegedly "Western" algebraic equations of which they are instances. In the name of national pride, students are being deprived of conceptual tools that are crucial in solving the real-world mathematical problems they will encounter as scientists and engineers.

Hinduization is not limited to mathematics alone. History curricula have always been favorite targets of religious nationalists. Under the growing influence of religious nationalists in the state and central governments, the earlier emphases on secularism is being reversed. New history textbooks celebrate all things Hindu (including even the caste system), propagate the myth of India as the original home of the "Aryan race," and deplore all "foreigners," including the Muslims. The history of Indian science and technology is not exempt. It is described as an unfolding of the Hindu genius, although material accomplishments (ancient technologies, for example) are emphasized over the penchant for critical inquiry that exists in some Indian traditions.

I have not come across any critique of Vedic mathematics from any of the intellectuals who have been so vocal in their criticism of "West-

ern" science. The only opposition to the communalization of education has come from scientists, mathematicians, and other intellectuals associated with the people's science movements. It is quite likely that when confronted with the blatant nationalism driving such attempts, those who criticize modern science as a "Western" implant often try to distance themselves from the BJP's zeal for institutionalizing Vedic knowledge. But the fact remains that the BJP is not doing anything that those who see modern science as "inherently Western" have not themselves clamored for in the past. A good example is the well-known "Penang Declaration on Science and Technology" signed by prominent proponents of ethno-sciences in 1988. Among many other demands, the declaration calls for a system of education that "appreciates the value of indigenous scientific and technological culture. . . . the teaching of science should never be divorced from the value-system of the indigenous civilization. The students should also develop a critical faculty so that they may judge the cultural and ideological bias of western science and technology." (The declaration is silent on the biases of indigenous civilizations.)

The BJP may be on the wrong side of the egalitarian ideals espoused by science critics, but it is by no means on the wrong side of their constructivist logic. The irony is that the largely academic critics who offer sophisticated theoretical justifications for indigenous sciences have the material resources and the opportunities to escape being grounded in them. Vedic mathematics and other projects for Hinduization of education does not personally affect most of the academic critics of science, for their own children hardly ever attend the state-run schools that cater to the poor or the BJP-run schools that cater to small businesses. Those who are most ardent about locally situated knowledges are the least embedded locally: most of them have one foot in the transnational academic world to which they regularly escape.

Another illustration of the co-option of the left's advocacy for indigenous knowledges by the powers-that-be is the recent craze for *Vastu Shastra*, the Sanskrit name for the ancient Vedic rules that govern the construction of sacred

buildings on the basis of the "auspiciousness" of space. If the practice of this Hindu science were limited to the *nouveau riche* in Delhi and Bombay, who build their houses to maximize the "positive energy" that comes with spatial correctness, one could ignore it. But last June we witnessed how cultural ideas can play a role in politics. N. T. Rama Rao, the late chief minister of the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, sought the help of a traditional *Vastu Shastr*i to help him out of some political rough weather, and was told that his troubles would vanish if he entered his office from an east-facing gate. But on the east side of his office there was a slum through which his car could not pass. The chief minister ordered the slum to be demolished.

If the Indian left were as active in the people's science movement as it used to be, it would have led an agitation not only against the demolition of people's homes, but also against the superstition that was used to justify it. In a case like this, modern science and social justice were clearly pulling in the same direction, and the left could easily have made the pure irrationality of *Vastu Shastra* an opportunity for consciousness raising. A left movement that was not so busy establishing "respect" for non-Western knowledge would never have allowed the power-wielders to hide behind indigenous "experts."

I tried out this case on my social constructionist friends here in the United States. Although they see the injustice of the situation, they do not see why I am so exercised about the irrationality that led to it. We have our superstitions in the West, they tell me. Did not Nancy Reagan consult astrologers? As for my suggestion that if we want justice, we must challenge the irrationality of ideas that lead to injustice, I am told that there is no need for proving that *Vastu Shastra* is wrong and modern science correct. I am told that seeing the two culturally bound descriptions of space at par with each other is progressive in itself, for then *neither* can claim to know the absolute truth, and thus tradition will lose its hold on people's mind. I am told that this desire to prove that traditional

knowledge is an incorrect representation of nature is a sign of a scientistic mind-set, a hang-over from my training in biology that I must overcome if I do not want to re-engineer the society of my birth on technocratic lines. Finally, I am told that I am an incorrigible modernist if I believe that Western science has any democracy-enhancing potential in my part of the world.

After all this, I should hardly be surprised when I hear my position labeled as that of the "antidemocratic right," as it often is within the radical circles of science critics. I plead guilty to believing that modern science is not something to be deconstructed and overcome. It must have an active role in progressive politics. The alternative is staring us all in the face. It is called religious fundamentalism, and it is not pretty. □

Notes

¹ The Hindu-nationalist BJP won 194 (about 36 percent) of the 543 seats in the lower house of India's Parliament in the general elections held in May 1996, with the secular Congress party trailing with only 139 seats (25 percent). As the short-lived BJP government failed to come up with the two-thirds majority needed, it had to hand the reins of power to a coalition of center-left parties. However, most observers don't expect the current coalition government to last for long, and anticipate that BJP will emerge even stronger in the next elections.

The BJP's rise to national prominence is truly impressive—and frightening. Until the last decade or so, the BJP was considered a communal party, a pariah with barely 2 percent of seats in the parliament. Its increased popularity represents a defeat of the ideals of secularism and modernity that India set for itself after its inde-

pendence from the British.

² For representative postcolonial science critiques, see Ashis Nandy (ed.), *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 1988); Ziauddin Sardar (ed.), *The Revenge of Athena* (London: Mansell, 1988). For a representative science critique from a Western multicultural perspective, see Sandra Harding, "Is Science Multicultural?" *Configuration* (2:301-330, 1994). The Hindu right's views on science and technology mentioned in this paper are gleaned from press reports from India.

³ See Andrew Ross, "Introduction," *Social Text* (46-47 Spring/Summer, 1996), p.4.

⁴ See Sandra Harding, "Science is 'Good to Think With,'" *Social Text* (46-47, Spring/Summer, 1996).

⁵ Reproduced in Ziauddin Sardar (see note 2).

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EDMUND WILSON

—AND OUR NON-WILSONIAN AGE

Has the American culture that could once generate an Edmund Wilson become incapable of generating anyone similar today? Has something fundamental changed in American life, and is the age of critics-in-general (and readers-in-general) behind us?

The idea that some such downward development has taken place was proposed by Russell Jacoby in *Dissent* in 1983, then was elaborated by James Atlas in the *New York Times Magazine* and again by Jacoby in a slightly muddled book called *The Last Intellectuals*. And from those long-ago seeds have subsequently blossomed ten thousand articles by as many authors, new articles all the time, embellishing the never-ending theme of a break or rupture in American intellectual life. Then we had thinkers and critics of independence and stature, the nonacademic essayists; now we have none, or almost none. The expositions of this idea have taken many strange turns. Yet the reality of a cultural shift is hard to dispute—and the nature of that reality and some of its causes can be seen, I think, with a glance at Wilson and his generation, born around 1895, and at the generation of Atlas and Jacoby, the writers of my own age, who were born fifty or sixty years later.

These two generations have this in common: they each underwent, in their youth, the disillusioning experience of watching America march off to a pointless and devastating war—against Kaiser Germany or against Communist Vietnam. And the response of a certain number of very

clever people from both generations was noticeably parallel, given a half century's worth of cultural evolution. The response was to turn with real revulsion away from the ordinary sensibilities and sentimentalities of middle-class American life, in favor of a European avant garde and radical leftism, always with the hope of giving the radical ideas a new, American twist. In Wilson's case, you can see in his diaries from the 1910s and 1920s and some other early writings how passionately he felt those impulses. He served in France during the Great War. He worked in the medical corps; he was like Hemingway and Dos Passos in that respect. And when he got back home he was not the same man as before. He moved to Greenwich Village and took up a literary life working for the magazines, feeling that he was doing something very rebellious and radical. (Only in later years did Wilson reinterpret this career of his as an atavistic, conservative return to the archaic values of an older American era.)

Rebelliousness brought him to the writings of Mallarmé, Valéry, Proust, Eliot, and a few others. He saw in their work a high aestheticist devotion to the inner world of the imagination, but then again, he was attracted to the idea of science, too, and to the study of the outer world. He hoped that, from a union of literature and science, a new avant garde might emerge, something romantic and neoclassical, modernist and naturalist at once—a literature that might point to a new way of living. By the late 1920s, Wilson's dismay at American society, his faith in science and his more-than-literary hopes for literature led him to Marxism, too. And each of these stages in his career was recapitulated in a

This essay is adapted from a presentation at the conference, "Edmund Wilson: Centennial Reflections," offered by the Program in American Studies at Princeton University in November, 1995.

different form by a good number of the people who were young a half century later.

The people who started out in the era of the Vietnam War—some of them, not everybody—felt a noticeably similar desire to withdraw from the American mainstream. The withdrawal led, in their case, to the (mostly) French philosophers of postmodernism and to the idea of uniting literature with science (in the form of linguistics, whence semiotics and deconstruction). There was an idea of giving priority to the imaginary over the real—a great principle of the postmodern style in philosophy and the arts. And there was the contradictory idea of giving priority to the real over the imaginary—therefore a turn to Marxism in a variety of novel applications.

Yet for all these parallels, the writing that resulted was completely different. Wilson learned to write cultural journalism from the nineteenth-century French critic, Hippolyte Taine (who was, by the way, a main founder of the idea of joining together science and literature). To Taine, and to Wilson, too, cultural journalism was an art—and the king of commentaries. But what kind of literary aspiration took root among the young intellectuals of a half century later? Instead of an ideal of cultural journalism there was an ideal of scientific-minded philosophy. Theory became king of commentaries.

Instead of a devotion to serious literature there was a celebration of popular culture—partly in order to shock the older generation, partly out of a recognition that, by the 1960s, the cultural categories of high and low had been scrambled by life and not by critics. And for any young person who felt those impulses, the right kind of career might be to take up a guitar and join a rock band; or to dash off pop culture criticism in the antiliterary automatic-writing style of the countercultural weeklies; or, less daringly, to enter graduate school and become an avant garde professor of cultural theory. But the right kind of career no longer had much to do with writing the kind of critical essay that Wilson might have admired.

Wilson and several generations of writers

who came after him could feel that, by devoting themselves to the art of the critical essay, they were engaging the spirit of their time. But the people who started out during the Vietnam War or in its aftermath, and who nonetheless took an interest in the kind of writing that Wilson produced, found themselves engaged in a slightly musty enterprise, drawn more to writers of an older generation than to writers of their own age. For no one could doubt that the real excitement of the moment lay in the enterprises that went under the name of theory, meaning Marxism, feminism, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and so forth. And if you want to see the consequence of these developments, you have only to look at the ten thousand articles that, coming after the original presentations by Jacoby and Atlas, have pointed to a rupture in American intellectual life. The simple notion of an essayist in Wilson's style—someone who writes artfully and knowledgeably for the literary-minded reader on broad topics—has faded so far into the past that, for any number of writers and editors today, the old idea has become nearly impossible to understand.

Jacoby introduced the term “public intellectual” to distinguish a writer like Wilson from the professors who address specialized, private audiences on narrow topics. But the term public intellectual, having escaped from the lab, has mutated horribly until by now it has come to mean a professor—who, unlike other professors, has succeeded in getting on television or in being celebrated in magazine puff pieces. The term public intellectual has come to express a fascination with the size of the audience (is someone's name recognized by millions?) or with political influence (dinners at the White House?). But the question of what is actually written no longer seems to merit discussion. And so, the rupture is real enough, and ours is an age of the university department and the television set and the slick magazine, but it is not an age of the literary intellectual.

There may be one other similarity between Wilson's generation and the people who came of age during the Vietnam War. In the case of Wilson's contemporaries, the original impulses

that emerged from the Great War and the avant garde of the 1920s ran aground after awhile, and everybody who had been caught up in the excitement of the years after the war had to change, or go under. That moment occurred around 1940. A number of Wilson's friends died in that period, and a number of others—Dos Passos is an example—lost a part of their talent. Wilson himself went through a difficult time. His old notion about an impending avant-garde breakthrough in literature was no longer sustainable. And his ideas about Marxism fell apart entirely.

These ideas, his Marxism, can be a little difficult for readers to make sense of today—which makes it hard to understand what the collapse of those ideas meant to him. Wilson's Marxism was his own concoction. In the early years of the Great Depression he was attracted to the Communist party, but he turned against the Communists soon enough—warned against them by Dos Passos, who advised him (in a letter from May 1932) to “introduce a more native lingo” into his radicalism. And Wilson set out to do just that, philosophically as well as rhetorically. His idea was to mix together what he had learned from Taine with a few concepts that had been developed by Max Eastman, the old editor of the *Masses*. From Taine, Wilson drew something of a positivist idea about the advance of science and mankind. From Eastman (whom no one reads today—but he wrote wonderful things, with a wonderful lightness), he drew a pragmatist disdain for Marx's Hegelian logic, combined with an admiration for Lenin, the scientific-minded man of practical action (as Eastman imagined).

Taine, Eastman, positivism, pragmatism—these influences put Wilson at odds with entire aspects of conventional Marxism. Reading him, you could almost imagine that he was arguing against Marxism itself. But not so. He wanted nothing to do with dialectical philosophy or the legacy of Hegel, but he was adamant about historical progress, about the working class as the bearer of that progress, about the notion of a scientific understanding of society as the key to working-class action, and about the moral failure of capitalism. His Marxism was peculiar; but it was Marxism.

Under its inspiration he produced his two books of 1930s social and political journalism, *The American Jitters* and *Travels in Two Democracies*. He wrote some of the essays in *The Triple Thinkers* (the pieces on Flaubert, John Jay Chapman, Shaw, and the not very successful essay on Marxism itself) and in *The Wound and the Bow* (especially the very moving essay on Dickens). He wrote *To the Finland Station*, which is not just about Marxism but breathes its spirit—if you take Marxism's spirit to be a dedication to human liberation and not dogmatic fanaticism. Marxism, in short, animated a big portion of his best work, and the collapse of his faith in it must have been a bitter experience.

On the other hand, there's nothing like an intellectual collapse to stimulate a few new ideas. The conventional opinion about Wilson's later work—the notion that, after 1940, he scattered his energies on a variety of topics without a central theme—seems to me not entirely accurate. If you read his later writings in the light of his Marxism and its failure, it should be obvious that, during the years from 1940 until his death in 1972, he was offering a series of replies to what he had written previously: now arguing against the philosophical theories that had proved to be mistaken, now looking for alternatives to the Marxist future that had once been his hope. The most ambitious of these later writings—his *Patriotic Gore*, about the literature of the Civil War—ought to be read, it seems to me, as a rejoinder to *Finland Station*. The whole point of *Finland Station* was to show mankind's gradual achievement of mastery over the laws of history—the rise of social science, leading to political action to create a better society, as undertaken by Lenin in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

In developing this theme Wilson had the occasion to quote Trotsky on the topic of the American Civil War (from Trotsky's debate with John Dewey, *Their Morals and Ours*). “History has different yardsticks for the cruelty of the Northerners and the cruelty of the Southerners in the Civil War,” Trotsky said. “A slave-owner who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cun-

ning and violence breaks the chains—let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us that they are equals before a court of morality!” Already in writing *Finland Station* Wilson was uncomfortable with that kind of reasoning. But the purpose of *Patriotic Gore* was to turn against it entirely. The book on the Civil War really did hold the North and the South as equals in the court of morality. Wilson saw Lincoln as a tyrant, and for the slaves he summoned no great sympathy.

These attitudes scandalized Wilson’s liberal friends at the time, and they scandalize us today, and the temptation is strong to dismiss *Patriotic Gore*’s more obnoxious passages as simple mischief-making. Wilson did like to toy with his readers. But his intention, entirely serious, in making those remarks in *Patriotic Gore* was to propose a counter-theory to the idea of history that he had presented in *Finland Station*. He wanted to argue that notions of progress, of world history advancing toward some superior endpoint, of scientific confidence in the forward motion of mankind, were merely a cover for the crimes committed by people like Lenin and Trotsky. He wanted us to fear power, instead of seeking to harness it to projects that we think of as worthy.

Wilson never lost his young man’s indignation against the shape of modern society and market economics. But instead of looking for alternatives in a Marxist future he now began to look in back corners of the society that already existed, in minority cultures that had preserved some integrity of their own against the depredations of mass culture and the capitalist economy. Or he looked into the remote past. The social and political journalism that he wrote in the 1930s constituted his search for the socialist future, but the journalism that he wrote after 1940—about ancient Hebrews, modern Zunis, Iroquois, French Canadians, Haitians, and the gentry of upstate New York—constituted a search for a living past. The journalism of the 1930s corresponded to his Marxist idea of history, and the journalism from the years after 1940 corre-

sponded to his anti-Marxist idea. The later work was a criticism of the earlier, and was all the livelier for being so.

This turn in Wilson’s writing offers a last resemblance to the generation that came along half a century after his. We, too, seem to be going through a two-stage development. The first stage—the radicalism of theoretical system-building, with its antiliterary results—lasted quite a few years after the Vietnam era. In the university, where ideas get frozen, that original stage will no doubt endure for as long as a handful of elderly professors cling to their tenure. Still, the generation that came up during the Vietnam era has sooner or later had to discover that “theory” and the various isms may have certain virtues, and may continue to display those virtues in the future—but theory and the isms cannot go beyond the limits of the academy, in some respects cannot even achieve the limits of the academy.

When was that discovery made? Our equivalent of Wilson’s 1940—when did it take place? I think that, for a good number of people, the discovery arrived in the mid-1980s, and it came in the form of the argument about a rupture in American intellectual life. For what did it mean to draw a distinction between *then*, the age of independent public intellectuals, and *now*, the age of the jargon-spouting professors? To my mind, drawing that distinction offered a way to express a weary frustration with the system-building theories. It offered a way of countering those theories—not by constructing a new supertheory to replace the older ones, or by reverting to the preradical habits of the academy, or by taking up the dogmatism of the neoconservative table-thumpers. The idea, instead, was to look over our shoulders—backward, to the age of *then*—and to recognize the virtue of certain work from the past and of writers older than ourselves. To stop scorning the intellectuals from earlier generations; to take them as models; to hold ourselves to their standards. Anyway, to give it a try. The idea was to heal the rupture in American intellectual life by the act of recognizing it. □

FUTURISTIC BLUES

In *Looking Backward*, Edward Bellamy's classic nineteenth-century utopian novel, Julian West falls asleep on Decoration Day in 1887 and awakens from a deep trance 113 years later at the start of a new millennium. Julian's trance has kept him from aging and, like Rip Van Winkle, he begins his new life healthy but in a state of shock. The shock soon turns to joy, however. Julian has left behind a world of social strife in which living as a rich man among the poor made him feel as if he belonged to an alien race. The America of 2000 is by contrast a model of efficiency and egalitarianism. The government is a Great Trust for which everybody works part of his or her life. The labor strikes and social unrest that caused Julian so much worry in 1887 are gone. Science and cooperative management have produced a new solidarity. Best of all, this transition to a modern utopia has been accomplished without bloodshed. As Julian's host and social guide Dr. Leete explains to him, "The change had been long foreseen. Public opinion had become fully ripe for it, and the whole mass of people was behind it. There was no more possibility of opposing it by force than by argument."

Our own view of the coming millennium is very different from Bellamy's. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the movies, where, rather than learning from our mistakes or using science to improve our lives, we see ourselves doing the opposite. We imagine the meanness and cruelty of the present, magnified beyond anything we have known, coming with us. In 1995,

three very different futuristic films—Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days*, Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*, and Kevin Costner's *Waterworld*—brought home this point. In each film the message was unmistakable: dystopia, not utopia, is what we can look forward to.

In *Strange Days*, the setting is Los Angeles in December 1999. It is a dark and smoky Los Angeles, filled with crime and violence, and a population hooked on the cruel. People need bodyguards just to get by. The history of Nazi Germany is now treated as a subject for entertainment. In a nightclub the featured act is men in brown shirts burning books. But the key to this Los Angeles is virtual reality headgear that taps into the brain and touches people's feelings more deeply than anything they experience directly. The plot of *Strange Days* centers around Lenny Nero (played by the English actor Ralph Fiennes), a former cop who sells virtual reality clips for a living. Lenny finds himself pursuing a murderer who has used a virtual reality clip to frame him for a killing.

The plot in *Strange Days* is largely a device to keep the film from grinding to a halt. The heart of the movie is the picture it offers of America days away from the year 2000. Virtual reality headgear has become the new dope. People can get any sort of vicarious kicks they want. There is no penalty to pay. As Lenny tells a husband to whom he is trying to sell a sex tape, "It's about forbidden fruit. I can make it happen, and you won't even tarnish your wedding ring." The tapes that bring in the big money are not, however, sex tapes, but much kinkier

This article is adapted from the forthcoming book *The Triumph of Meanness* (Houghton Mifflin).

ones—those involving murder and rape. For these, buyers will pay big money, and as Lenny pursues the man who has framed him, we are shown a cyber-sadism industry that thrives the way coke dealing once did. At the start of the new century, the vicarious thrills we want are those that give us the power of the victimizer and terrorist.

Strange Days ends with Lenny finding the real killer and turning out to be one of the film's comparative good guys. But as New Year 2000 is being celebrated in the film's final scenes, what emerges is pure gloom. "What's the point? What the hell are we celebrating?" asks an anonymous caller to a radio station. It is a rhetorical question that is the movie's as well.

In *12 Monkeys*, the darkness and rubble of Los Angeles in the year 2000 have been taken to a new level. The year is 2035. Thirty-eight years earlier, a lab assistant, working with deadly viruses and motivated by a genocidal hate, loosed a plague that killed all but 1 percent of the world's population. Those who survived are living underground. Wild animals roam the cities, and people are the hunted creatures if they surface for long.

It is in this context that James Cole (Bruce Willis) is sent time-traveling by the scientists who rule America. They want him to find out how the plague began, and because James is their prisoner, he has little choice but to go along with what is asked of him. It is a task that lands James in a pre-plague insane asylum, where he meets Kathryn Raily, a psychiatrist played by Madeline Stowe, who eventually comes to believe his story of time travel. The two set out to complete James's work, and if at all possible, stop the worst from happening. They get their answer to the cause of the plague. They even fall in love. But no one in *12 Monkeys* has the power to alter the world's fate. The worst happens. Gilliam's picture of America today, filled with crumbling buildings and crackpots carrying signs predicting the end of life, becomes our future. Like the child who, as a time traveler in *12 Monkeys*, is able to see his adult self die, we have nothing to look forward to.

Even more important, in the end there is

nothing to relieve the bleakness of underground America in 2035. The scientists confer with James through tiny television sets rather than face to face, and at every chance they get, they treat him with cruelty. When we first see him, he has been confined to a tiny cell, but in the ravaged America of 2035 being free is no bargain. Destruction has taught us nothing. An Orwellian sadism controls government and personal relationships.

Sadism, only of a much more primitive variety, also defines the lives of the earth's survivors in *Waterworld*. The time is the indefinite future. A new Ice Age has left most of the globe covered in water. Dirt is bought and sold by the ounce, as if it were gold. People either roam the sea like nomads or live crowded together on tiny atolls. As in *12 Monkeys*, life is brutal, and society provides no relief. What has emerged is not a world filled with Robinson Crusoes but one in which a crude Darwinism sets the conditions of existence.

The villains in *Waterworld* are the Smokers, a gang of pirates who represent the last vestiges of a predatory industrialism. Operating from the hull of a supertanker, they attack everyone who has anything they might want. Their idea of pleasure is smoking and joyriding in old cars they keep below the deck of their supertanker. In contrast to the Smokers stands the ecologically pure Mariner played by Kevin Costner. The Mariner has developed gills behind his ears, and as a successful mutant, he has advantages over others in the struggle to survive. But the key to the Mariner is his ability to live with nature and waste nothing. From his wind-powered ship to his filter for turning urine into drinking water, the Mariner pushes the resources at his disposal to their utmost.

He is not, however, allowed to live in the isolation he seeks. When he stops at an atoll to do some trading, he is imprisoned by its citizens for being a mutant. And then, when he is helped to escape from the atoll by a woman and a little girl, he finds himself pursued by the Smokers. As in *Strange Days* and *12 Monkeys*, the plot keeps events moving, but the real issue is what we have come to after our years of evo-

lution. The answer is, not much. After an epic battle with the Smokers, the Mariner is able to guide the girl and the woman to land. But there is no sense on the Mariner's part that these are people he wants to be with. After helping get them settled, he decides that roaming the seas is best for him, and like a gunslinger in the old West who knows he can't be a homesteader, he takes off for parts unknown. He is not about to start up a new species.

What we see in the movies is not very different in its pessimism from our "realistic" scenarios about what awaits us down the road. In February 1994, the normally sedate *Atlantic Monthly* appeared on newsstands with a cover that showed a crumpled globe on fire and a headline that in huge capital letters declared: "THE COMING ANARCHY; NATIONS BREAK UP UNDER THE TIDAL FLOW OF REFUGEES FROM ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL DISASTER. BORDERS CRUMBLE, ANOTHER TYPE OF BOUNDARY IS ERECTED—A WALL OF DISEASE. WARS ARE FOUGHT OVER SCARCE RESOURCES, ESPECIALLY WATER, AND WAR ITSELF BECOMES CONTINUOUS WITH CRIME, AS ARMED BANDS OF STATELESS MARAUDERS CLASH WITH THE PRIVATE SECURITY FORCES OF THE ELITES. A PREVIEW OF THE FIRST DECADES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY." The *Atlantic* headline did not exaggerate the findings in Robert Kaplan's cover story, "The Coming Anarchy." For Kaplan, author of an earlier book on the Balkans, the chaos of West Africa, the immediate focus of his *Atlantic* article, has become "the symbol of worldwide demographic, environmental, and societal stress, in which criminal anarchy emerges as the real 'strategic' danger." In the 1996 book-length version of his *Atlantic* essay, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, Kaplan compares his findings to those of the eighteenth-century English historian Edward Gibbon, who in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* describes the empire as a short happy period followed by centuries of violence and chaos. But the Gibbon analogy is gratuitous, given the

ruthlessness Kaplan sees in the future as the haves of the world opt to protect themselves from the have-nots.

Kaplan's "doomsterism," to use historian Paul Kennedy's word, was taken seriously by the White House. Several months later in a *Boston Globe* interview Bill Clinton even spoke about Kaplan's *Atlantic* article in terms of our dealing with a future that looked "like one of those Mel Gibson *Road Warrior* movies." But it is the vividness of Kaplan's scenario, rather than its pessimism, that sets it apart. Among historians, doomster scenarios in which cruelty and warfare are the norm have become routine. In an article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* a year before Kaplan's essay, political scientist Samuel Huntington predicted a bleak future of worldwide conflict based on cultural differences, and two months after Kaplan's article, Edward Luttwak, in a *London Review of Books* essay entitled, "Why Fascism is the Wave of the Future," predicted that growing prosperity among the elites, in combination with growing middle-class insecurity, would provoke the same kind of political reaction that in the years after World War I brought Hitler and Mussolini to power.

In our day-to-day lives a similarly grim and Hobbesian view of the future may be seen in our willingness to wage an economic war against the old. The war itself and the feelings it inspires are best described by an anonymous poster that circulated a few years ago: "Senior citizens are the biggest carriers of AIDS," the poster read, "Hearing Aids, Band-Aids, Rol-Aids, Walking-Aids, Medicaid, and Government Aid." Below this was a drawing of a toothless old man with a Band-Aid on his bald head and a hearing aid jutting out of one ear. What lies behind the poster and the resentment it embodies are fears about the future of Social Security.

In 1900, 4 percent of America's population was over sixty-five. Today it is 13 percent, and by 2011, when the first baby boomers, those born in 1946, start to retire, it will jump again. By 2020 one in every six Americans, compared to today's one in eight, will be eligible for full Social Security benefits. It is a situation that will put Social Security, which currently is producing a \$65 billion surplus (thanks to adjust-

ments made to it in 1977 under Jimmy Carter and in 1983 under Ronald Reagan) in deep trouble if nothing is done to change present law. Under current rates the system will run out of money by 2025, and by 2035, the year of *12 Monkeys*, it will be operating at a one-trillion-dollar annual deficit. The problem could not have been foreseen when Social Security began. In 1935 life expectancy was just sixty-two—three years less than the age at which workers now get full benefits. Today, life expectancy has reached seventy-six, with the average worker spending 26 percent of his or her adult life in retirement, compared to just 7 percent in 1940, when Social Security benefits went to under 1 percent of the population.

"This act does not offer anyone an easy life," Franklin Roosevelt observed of Social Security in a 1938 fireside chat, and amending Social Security in the spirit with which it was described by Roosevelt in the thirties would certainly make sense in the coming years. But what has happened in the course of the nineties is something much crueler: a generational war that in its spite makes the youth slogan of the sixties, "Never trust anyone over thirty," seem like a joke.

Leading the generational war early in the decade were two twentysomething groups—Third Millennium (now primarily a New York-based Generation X think tank) and Lead or Leave (a Washington-based organization, now defunct). The political tone the two groups initially adopted was reflected in a protest Lead or Leave ran in 1993 at the Washington headquarters of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). As the music of Seal and Pearl Jam blasted from a boom box, the Lead or Leave pickets chanted:

One, two, three, four
We won't take it any more
Five, six, seven, eight
Cut the debt, cause we can't wait

The immediate reason for Lead or Leave's protest was President Clinton's new budget proposals, but in targeting the AARP and driving home the differences in their musical tastes, Lead or Leave was bent on making a second point as well. The elderly are getting too much of our tax money. They need to be taken down a peg.

A few months later in a *Chicago Tribune* op-

ed piece patronizingly entitled "An Appeal to Grandma and Grandpa," Rob Nelson and Jon Cowan, co-founders of Lead or Leave, continued the assault. Assuming in their essay that grandparents were out of touch with everyone but their own generation, Nelson and Cowan outlined how well grandparents were doing compared to the young and then went on to advise, "Perhaps next time you hear from the American Association of Retired Persons, you'll let them know that you talked with your grandkids and decided that you support a fair reform of Social Security. And demand that they pass the word along to Congress. Otherwise, tell them you won't be renewing your membership in AARP. You'll save yourself \$5 a year and a fortune in your children's future."

The ideas of Lead or Leave and Third Millennium are still central to our discussions of the elderly, where we continue to be haunted, as economist Peter G. Peterson puts it in his new book, *Will America Grow Up Before It Grows Old?*, by the fear of being a "nation of Floridas." Jessica Matthew, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, has compared cleaning up the Social Security mess to cleaning up after a herd of cows in the living room and sarcastically suggested that Social Security checks should be printed in red after a retiree has used up the money he or she put in. Senator Bob Kerry has cast the demands of seniors in an even more sardonic light. "Please don't tell me every American over sixty-five is foraging in the alley for garbage or eating dog food," he



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for change to become effective.*

told the *New Republic*. "They're going to Las Vegas with their COLAs—while kids don't have computers in class." And even at the National Institute of Aging, the growth of the elderly as a class has been seen in terms that put the elderly in the category of foreigners. The aging of the baby-boom generation, Richard Suzman, the director of the Office of Demography, has declared, "could have an impact on our society of equal magnitude to the tidal wave of immigration at the turn of the century."

Writing on where all this is likely to end, MIT economist Lester Thurow has predicted a future in which "class warfare is apt to be defined as the young against the old, rather than the poor against the rich." As the fears of groups like Lead or Leave and Third Millennium spread, it is clear that we are not going to have to wait long for that future. Granny bashing is here, and with 41 percent of their income on average coming from the government, the elderly are enormously vulnerable.

For Julian West, the psychological impact of being trapped in a present that seems only likely to produce a meaner version of itself comes through in the last chapter of *Looking Backward*, when in a dream he finds himself transported back to the Boston he left in 1887. He is struck by the "squalor and human degradation" he encounters on the streets, but his worst shock comes at a dinner party when he tries to explain that it is possible to have a future in which meanness and class warfare are not the rule. Treated as insane for making such remarks, Julian finds himself feeling like "an escaped convict who dreams that he has been recaptured and brought back to his dark and reeking dungeon."

For us, the feeling of being caught up in a present that seems only likely to lead to a crueler and harsher future has been more gradual than for Julian West and hence less nightmarish. But the psychological toll it has taken has, nonetheless, been enormous. Missing from American life in the 1990s has been faith in what has

historically been thought of as American exceptionalism: the belief that what distinguishes us from other nations is our commitment to an ideal of democratic equality and our willingness to be an example, a city upon a hill, as John Winthrop, Massachusetts's first governor, put it. No longer believing that things are going to get better naturally or that the government can be counted on to help us (by 1992, 75 percent of all Americans said they "almost never" trust the government), we rely on making it on our own and distrust the idea of commonality. The world of *12 Monkeys* or the rhetoric of Lead or Leave becomes our vision of the future.

The question is how we can move beyond this. In defending *Looking Backward* against its nineteenth-century critics, Edward Bellamy observed that at certain points in history a vision of the future is often more important than practical advice. "Until we have a clear idea of what we want and are sure we want it," he wrote, "it would be a waste of time to discuss how we are to get it."

Bellamy's utopian argument remains powerful. The point of looking into the future as he did in *Looking Backward* is not simply to give ourselves a goal. It is to give ourselves a perspective on the present that ordinary politics does not yield. Such imaginings, as Irving Howe observed in his 1993 essay "Two Cheers for Utopia" (*Dissent*, Spring 1993), remind us that nothing is more mistaken than acquiescing to the given just because it is here.

What Bellamy's and Howe's defense of utopianism cannot spare us from is the pessimism of a culture like our own, in which the meanness and spite of the present seem so deeply entrenched that we imagine them playing an even greater role in our future. In the face of such pessimism, it is, as Hollywood shows, dystopia, not utopia, that emerges as the predictor of our fate. We cannot for the life of us imagine a twenty-first century in which the cruelty of twentieth-century America shocks us as the cruelty of nineteenth-century America now does when we look back on our historical record. □

LOOKING AT HOPPER: AN ART OF SUBTRACTION

One of the great canonical shifts of recent decades has been the enthusiastic rediscovery of earlier American painting. Thanks to the success of the abstract expressionists after the war, Americans began to realize that they too had a world-class art, not simply a minor native vintage. But the waning of abstraction in the 1960s also lent new prestige to figurative painting. Advanced critics, museum curators, art historians, and finally collectors and crowds turned hungry eyes toward the landscape painters of the Hudson River school, the major and minor American impressionists, and above all the craggy, idiosyncratic American realists—such isolated, brooding figures as Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, and Edward Hopper. If 1996 was the year of Homer, with a huge retrospective of his work in Washington, Boston, and New York, then 1995 was the moment of Edward Hopper, marked by a major biography by Gail Levin, a fine brief commentary on his work by the poet Mark Strand, and a stunningly misconceived but revealing exhibition on “Edward Hopper and the American Imagination” at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

The elusive subject of the Whitney show, never fully defined, was the archetypal Hopper, the painter whose desolate but strangely distanced images influenced the way we see the world around us. But by grouping his paintings iconically—paintings of isolated buildings, for example, of people in offices and apartments, or of people staring eerily into bright sunlight—and trying to link them to too many American movies, poems, stories, and photographs, the

Whitney show made him look narrower, more repetitive than he was. The show risked turning Hopper into cliché by emphasizing the haunting Hopper “look” and the endless allusions to familiar paintings like “Nighthawks.” This was Hopper as visual stereotype, a *film noir* Hopper validated by popular culture and vulgarized by advertising.

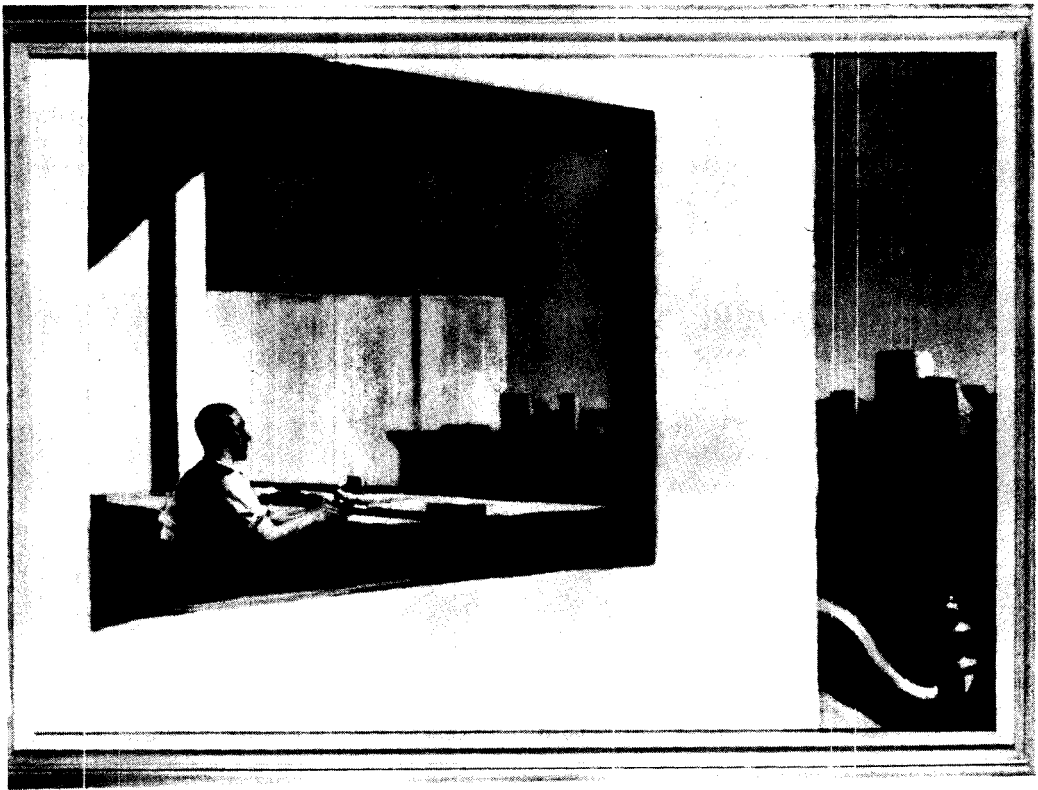
Around this questionable theme the museum assembled fifty-nine of his greatest and most resonant canvases, paintings I returned to again and again, seeking to fathom mysteries they stubbornly refused to divulge. I thought I knew Hopper well from the great 1980 retrospective at the Whitney, but the new exhibit convinced me that many of the paintings—constantly surprising in their formal composition, their wealth of sensory details, and their knotty human enigmas—were virtually inexhaustible as objects of contemplation. It’s not loneliness and alienation, Hopper’s supposed themes, but this inaccessibility that gives Hopper’s work its strikingly modern feeling.

Hopper is one of the great lonely American originals, like the misunderstood Eakins and the even more reclusive Homer, who deliberately left us so little record of his life and opinions. We think of Hopper as a realist, a figurative painter who gives us a faithful rendition of the physical world, yet this does little to explain the aura of mystery in his work, the sense of detachment combined with almost spiritual intensity. He has often been acclaimed as the poet of the ordinary, the nondescript—the forerunner of photographers like Walker Evans—con-

ferring unprecedented attention on gas stations, motel rooms, movie theaters, city streets and buildings, bare offices, late-night diners, clapboard houses, railroad tracks, empty fields, and deserted country roads. This is the Hopper who expands our field of vision to include the things we see every day. Yet Hopper is also a painter who estranges us from the ordinary, who gives us expressionless people, their features stylized, simplified, or enigmatic, people striking stiff poses in settings over which they have seemingly little control. I'm referring not simply to paintings that are deliberately, even amusingly enigmatic, like the late "Excursion Into Philosophy" (1959), which gives us the figure of a troubled man sitting on the edge of a bed beside an open book and a sleeping woman, cut off above the buttocks, in a room dominated by two rectangular patches of sunlight. (Hopper reportedly commented that the man "has been reading Plato rather late in life.") Or the haunt-

ingly strange "People in the Sun" (1960), with its group of formally dressed sunbathers arrayed on deck chairs yet staring out at an almost lunar landscape.

No, even in less puzzling and problematic scenes, Hopper has a way of setting up a barrier between us and the ordinary, as in "Room in New York" (1932), which lets us look in on a couple through the window of their apartment, to see him reading the newspaper and her absent-mindedly fingering the piano. Crucially, the scene is framed by the masonry of the building, the square of the window—a rectangular pattern echoed by the paintings on the wall, the panels of the tall interior door, and the stonework to the left of the open window. Hopper himself loved peering through people's windows (from the elevated train, for example) to catch a fleeting glimpse of their lives. But by placing a window within the picture frame, Hopper is not so much turning us into voyeurs as demonstrating in good



Office in a Small City, oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, George A. Hearn Fund, 1953 (53.183)

modernist fashion that this is just a painting. A Hopper window is always a smaller panel that frames a scene and reflexively highlights its distant, self-conscious, and painterly qualities. Admitting us conditionally, these windows tease us with the limits of what we can know about other people.

The architecture of the scene puts scrupulous emphasis on point of view, just as modern writers like James, Conrad, and Fitzgerald use observer-narrators to ground mysterious activities and fabulous characters. Their novels come to us through a subjective prism—as highly accented testimony, not omniscient knowledge. Instead of placing us *in* the scene, Hopper's framing, like Marlow's or Nick Carraway's storytelling, preserves the aura of mystery; his paintings resist the narrative constructions we are tempted to foist upon them. By setting both a stone facade and a visual aperture between us and his scene, Hopper at once invites us in and keeps us at bay.

These framing effects are typical of Hopper's images of apartments, luncheonettes, storefronts, and offices, including the cartoonish "Night Windows" (1928), which shows us the rear end of a woman behind one of three bay windows; the famous "Nighthawks," set in a late-night diner straight out of Hemingway; the tiny "Stairway," "Office in a Small City," "Western Motel"; and the late "New York Office" (1962). In these generically titled canvases, Hopper takes the point of view of the perennial outsider looking in, while his figures seem to be vacantly gazing out at abbreviated fragments of architecture or landscape. An interesting essay could be written simply on truncated buildings in Hopper's work, including the famous "House by the Railroad," a piece of American Gothic said to have inspired Hitchcock's *Psycho*. The house is defined not just by its almost human isolation and its powerful mixture of sun and shadow but also by the painter's low angle of vision and by the railroad embankment that cuts off much of the lower floor, erases the foundation, and hems in the whole house. This can be compared to the amputated fragments of urban architecture visible from the windows of his offices and hotel rooms, as in "Hotel

by a Railroad," "New York Office," or "Office in a Small City."

This is an art of closure and fragmentation. The visual openness of Hopper's paintings is often limited by the panels within them, the windows and walls that conceal as much as they reveal. Hopper's blank-faced people are essentially gazing *from* nothing *toward* nothing, or at least toward nothing we can easily grasp. Many of them, like the women in "Western Motel" and "New York Office" look so stiff that—far from softening or humanizing the geometrical severity of the scenes around them—they seem frozen into stone-like attitudes, rarely revealing emotion, interacting with each other, or yielding any narrative of their behavior.

Hopper's windows serve not so much as revelations of people as separate, disjunctive planes that set up smaller units within the panel, enclosing and delimiting the scene rather than opening it up. In "Hotel By a Railroad," for example, a man looks out from a sparsely furnished room at a view so cramped—a bright piece of exterior wall, a sliver of window, a tiny segment of railroad track, the gray facade of a building beyond the tracks—that it makes his dim, featureless room seem airy by comparison. Never did railroad tracks seem less suggestive of movement. Never did a hotel room, though not at all shabby, seem more drably anonymous. A woman sits reading, but she seems scarcely connected to the man at the window. Hopper uses such a truncated view to invest the scene with a strong sense of blockage, something we already feel in the room itself. The window is wide open, the sun is shining, but the expressionless man might as well be staring into a void.

Despite the formal complexity of these layering effects, a sense of vacancy haunts us about Hopper's world: the country roads without any cars—as in "Route 6, Eastham"—the clumps of trees that appear like an undifferentiated darkness, the faces and personal histories that cannot be read, the city streets and railroad tracks that look like urban pastoral. As Lloyd Goodrich, a pioneer Hopper critic, noted long ago, "There are no crowds in his city, no rushing traffic; it appears unpopulated—monumental, not dy-

namic." Compare Whitman's city, thronging with pedestrians jostling each other, with Hopper's city, as in the famous "Early Sunday Morning," a 1930 painting the shape of a wide-screen movie still. (In fact, it was partly inspired by the urban set for Elmer Rice's *Street Scene*.)

The painting's stillness reminds me of Wordsworth's view of London from Westminster Bridge, another tranquil Sunday morning scene of rare calm at the heart of urban agitation. ("This City now doth, like a garment, wear/ The beauty of the morning, silent, bare.") In Hopper we see a single continuous horizontal line of blank windows and darkened store fronts, in which the most distinctive presences are a barber's pole, a fire hydrant, and the long thin shadows they cast in the early morning light. Like "Route 6, Eastham," the painting, at once desolate and richly pictorial, offers us a remarkable mixture of vacancy and radiance. We know how important light was to Hopper and his paintings. In the television interview he gave to Brian O'Doherty near the end of his life, he fends off the familiar questions about solitude or alienation by emphasizing his goal of capturing the exact effects of light at a given time of day. "I think I'm not very human," Hopper said. "I don't want to paint people posturing and grimacing. What I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house."

Hopper's elision of narrative and his unusual way of saturating surfaces with light contribute to the sense of vacancy that heightens the ominous atmosphere of his work. In "Summer in the City," a sort of companion piece to "Excursion Into Philosophy," we see a naked man sleeping and a woman, troubled, sitting at the edge of the bed as if to suggest some sexual unhappiness. Yet what conveys this grimly is the brilliant light that surrounds them, with windows at both ends of the bed and large patches of sunlight on the wall and floor. Hopper reverses his usual procedure by giving us, instead of a pool of light surrounded by darkness, an area of darkness hemmed in by menacing light, in sharp geometrical formations, like an alien force presence intruding on a scene of obscure personal distress. Hopper found many ways of turning depression into art.

Yet the first thing that struck me about the

Whitney show was how much richer the colors were than I remembered from 1980. The painter may have loved gray-toned, cheaply made urban movies like *Marty* and *The Savage Eye*, but only the mental landscape of his work is drab or impoverished, rarely the physical surface, where even the shadows are tonally luxurious. Ordinarily we think of radiance and color as plenitude, but in Hopper this impersonal lushness highlights the human absence—or, in "Summer in the City," torments the human presence—the way the gorgeous mesh of language, say, of a writer like Nabokov draws attention to the truncated humanity of his characters.

Occasionally Hopper's figures will confront the light almost on equal terms, holding their own against the geometry of sun and shadow, like the women gazing beyond the edge of the canvas in "Morning Sun" (1952) and "A Woman in the Sun" (1961). More often, they will be dwarfed by the brilliant effects of light on the surfaces that surround them, as the figures in the doorway in "High Noon" (1949) or on the steps in "Summertime" (1943) merely highlight the luminous sun and shadow enveloping them, almost turning them into formal statuary, elements of the architectural pattern. The ultimate Hopper painting, of course, is the one in which the subject is the house itself, stripped of all human presence, or simply the geometrical patterns created by the light, as in the late, great "Sun in an Empty Room" (1963), to which John Hollander devoted an extraordinary poem in the catalogue of the Whitney exhibition, in which he evokes a place that "is full, so full, of vacancy."

All this seems to suggest that Hopper's work was always tending toward abstraction, something achieved only in the simplified forms, generalized figures, and diminished surfaces of his last phase. Hopper himself rejected these comparisons with abstract expressionism and detested abstract art. Instead he preferred the "simple visual honesty" of Winslow Homer and considered Eakins "our greatest American painter," at once objective and profoundly expressive. Speaking personally, I can only recall that Hopper was the first painter to show me that modern painting need not be identified with abstraction, and that realism and abstraction

were anything but easy alternatives. Hopper's painting, like so many of the writers with whom his work reveals a strong kinship, is a realism of subtraction rather than abstraction, a leaving-out business, a realism of diminishment, in much the way Hemingway and Kafka suggested more by the aura of what they left out than by the sharply etched details they put in. Working like many modern writers, Hopper removed the story, the motive, the emotion, and the drama in order to suffuse his paintings with a different kind of subjectivity—exhilarating, menacing, or simply numbing, as the mood and subject possessed him. Hemingway's greatest stories, like "The Killers," which Hopper strongly admired, or "Big Two-Hearted River," are all aura, all suggestion: the "story" is merely the figurative ground from which all explanation has been subtracted. Hopper's work exemplifies Hemingway's famous "iceberg" theory of art, by which the little we can see is pregnant with all that remains submerged. This kind of realism is simply an alternative strategy of modernism.

In the same way, the enigmatic reserve of Hopper's work, its minimalism and formal purity, contributes to its emotional intensity. His is a uniquely accented realism, indebted to both Vermeer and Degas, never to be confused with photographic reproduction or genre painting.

The strangest context in which I ever saw Hopper's work was a huge Paris show about fifteen years ago called *Les realismes*, where his canvases were exhibited alongside specimens of Soviet and fascist art as 1930s reactions against international modernism. The exposition included academic landscapes reminiscent of salon art, idealized images of Russian workers and peasants, brutal icons of the new Aryan nationalism, neoclassical works by major modernists, and social protest paintings emerging from the Depression. The show made "realism" so elastic as to render it meaningless. Europeans have since come to understand Hopper far better. To see Hopper's canvases beside work so spiritually dead, so empty of all authentic emotion was to understand both the expressive strength of his own kind of vacancy and his deep affinities with modernism.

Like many modernists, Hopper tried to eliminate the dead hand of Victorian psychology, of facile, conventional explanation. Unlike the classic painters who feel they can read the soul in the lines of the face, the arch of the back, the folds of the robe, Hopper achieved power by burrowing deep into his own isolation and exploring the limits of what we can know. Hopper's geometry of light may hint at transcendence, but his realism was a realism of limits. □

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Jon Wiener

LIFE AT THE KRAMER HILTON

T

his past fall, Hilton Kramer, America's angriest art critic, began his fifteenth year editing the *New Criterion*, the neocon journal of art and culture. In Kramer's lead comment in the journal's "special anniversary issue," he rededicated the journal to fighting leftist "subversion"—which makes him sound like J. Edgar Hoover. In fact, he was not talking about the subversion of American national security, but rather of something he calls "disinterested criticism." The special issue follows the publication of *Against the Grain*, an anniversary anthology of forty-five *New Criterion* pieces; in his introduction to that volume, Kramer declares that, not only in the universities, but also in the museums, the federal arts agencies, and even in the media, dissent from "the legacy of 1960s radicalism" is "virtually nonexistent." Kramer lets you dream that the Reagan revolution never happened.

Reading Kramer's art columns written over the last several years—those from the *New Criterion* that were not included in the anthology, as well as those in the *New York Observer*, where Kramer has served as art critic since 1992, one finds a consistent style—outrage and contempt—and a consistent argument. Since the first issue of the *New Criterion*, Kramer has had two themes: contemporary art has been politicized by the left, and art criticism has degenerated—"true seriousness" and "informed intelligence" are under assault, "disinterested criticism" is almost dead. All this has a single cause: Kramer's Great Satan, "the sixties."

Much of Kramer's animus is directed toward the New York art world, and he is right that its hallmarks are hype, hustle, and greed. But the

problem here is hardly the sixties. That world is a product of the eighties, of the Age of Reagan, when rich Wall Street types were buying more art, at higher prices, than ever before in history; when the art market floated on a sea of junk bonds, greenmail, and leveraged buyouts. Places like the Pace-Wildenstein Sculpture Garden on Manhattan's Madison Avenue, which Kramer detests, are hardly expressions of the sixties counterculture; they are part of the blue-chip world of free-market corporate capitalism that Kramer celebrates.

In his fifteenth anniversary issue, Kramer again portrays himself as a beleaguered figure, standing alone as a defender of true seriousness against a cultural establishment that has politicized art. But in the world of art criticism today, Kramer is hardly isolated. Often he occupies a comfortable place in the middle of the critical mainstream: like most of the critics, he didn't like the Whitney's 1994 "Black Male" show; like most of the critics, he didn't like last year's Carnegie International; like most of the critics, he didn't like the Whitney's recent show on the Beats. The *Village Voice* is the living incarnation of the sixties, but Kramer agreed with its art critic, Peter Schjeldahl, in hating the new Pace sculpture garden.

The art Kramer likes is art everybody likes: over the past year, the exhibitions of Mondrian at MOMA, Brancusi in Philadelphia, and Vermeer in Washington. The only thing that distinguished Kramer from the others writing about Vermeer was that he failed to mention the fact that the Republican Congress shut down this once-in-a-lifetime exhibit—along with the rest of the federal government—in its destructive

attempt to balance the budget. Kramer opposes government funding for the arts—even funding for a Vermeer show.

The substantive difference between Kramer and the other critics can be found in his insistence that his own judgments about what's good and what's lousy are based on the disinterested application of standards of intrinsic merit—standards that have been abandoned by virtually everyone else. The problem of the left, he writes, is that it believes “nothing is meaningful or valuable *in itself*.” He takes as the principal exponent of that view Duke University critic Stanley Fish, who wrote, “There is no such thing as intrinsic merit,” a statement Kramer—with typical understatement—characterizes as “a version of nihilism and a license for sophistry,” as well as “a prescription for moral and cultural catastrophe.” If there is no such thing as intrinsic merit, he writes, “then criticism and scholarship degenerate into a species of propaganda, and morality becomes little more than a cynical calculus aimed at increasing personal advantage.”

What could this intrinsic merit be? That, of course, is the big question for aesthetic theory; it's also one Kramer needs to answer. It can't mean “universally agreed on,” as George Scialabba has written in these pages (“Living by Ideas,” Fall 1995), because obviously we don't all agree with Kramer—that's what makes him so angry. It can't refer to judgments made independently of or outside particular times and places and experiences, because there aren't any. When Stanley Fish says there is no such thing as intrinsic merit, he means only that all of us have to justify and explain why others should accept our criteria as legitimate.

Kramer claims to possess objective and rational aesthetic criteria, independent from his political views, but if you read his weekly and monthly writings on art over the last few years, you don't find any. Instead, you find reverential adjectives and hymns to greatness: how good is Vermeer? “very good indeed” because “what he does, he does perfectly.” For Mondrian, art was “a spiritual adventure.” Brancusi was “great” because of his “consummate technical skill and

remarkable intellectual command.” Pissarro was a “great painter” who did work of “astonishing quality.” Max Beckman is “one of the great portrait artists of the modern period.” And so on. Like the other critics, Kramer makes judgments about what's good and what's not; surprisingly, perhaps, he's not especially adept at explaining what's good about the art he does like. Despite his claims, Kramer does not enunciate anything like objective aesthetic standards.

Political art is bad art, while good art exists in a realm above politics, a separate realm of aesthetic value—for Kramer this is especially true of the modern art of abstraction. But, as one critic wrote in the *Nation*, “Modern art as a whole has had a far more explicit connection with social and political ideologies than is now commonly supposed.” The modernists “derived a good deal of their force and momentum from an overt attempt to change the quality—and at times, even the organization—of the societies in which they were conceived.” This passage was written by Hilton Kramer, art critic for the *Nation*, in June 1963.

During his year as the *Nation*'s art critic, he argued that abstract art “had a political component that cannot be completely assimilated to the purely formalistic analysis to which the middle-class temper of the Western democracies has reduced most serious discussion of art. Even artists such as Mondrian . . . whose styles seem totally absorbed in formal considerations, cannot really be understood apart from the social ideologies which acted as an impetus and an ideal in their aesthetic formulations.” Young Man Kramer politicized art criticism. He not only had a better understanding of the relationship between politics and the art he loved; he also wrote without bitterness, contempt, or loathing.

The issue of abstraction today provides a good place to examine Kramer's claim that he possesses objective aesthetic standards. He was unhappy with the Guggenheim's recent abstraction retrospective, and devoted much of his review to lambasting the author of the catalog for failing to mount a “rousing” and “spirited defense” of abstraction. The catalog, he com-

plained, “all but surrenders to the enemies of abstract art in a feckless attempt to appease and accommodate” them. The defenders of abstract art in the fifties claimed that it represented the highest and the purest aesthetic; its spontaneous gesture, they said, was bringing painting toward the sublime. But why should those claims be accepted as valid, any more than the claims made for artists practicing other styles in other periods? Kramer did not take on this fundamental problem in his review of the Guggenheim abstraction show. Instead he told readers that the best that American artists have thought and done reached a climax around 1960. They turn out to be the artists of his youth, the artists he wrote about for the *Nation*. And, Kramer says, it’s been downhill ever since. Kramer claims to be practicing disinterested criticism, but here he sounds like an aging Rolling Stones fan who hates rap music.

Although Kramer continues in his fifteenth anniversary issue to portray himself as a disinterested critic of the political in art, in fact he functions as a well-connected member of the right-wing punditocracy. In addition to editing the *New Criterion*, Kramer writes a weekly “Media Watch” column for the *New York Post*. It had been called “*Times Watch*,” and was devoted to bashing the *New York Times* for being left wing. Typical headline: “*Times* formally identifies with the counterculture.” But even Kramer couldn’t find enough to complain about in the *Times*, hence the title change. He writes often for the *Wall Street Journal* op-ed page—where he recently denounced Susan Sontag for criticizing intellectuals’ lack of support for Sarajevo. The far-right-wing *Washington Times* regularly highlights Kramer’s *New York Post* columns, including one in which he praised conservative columnist William Safire for calling Hillary Clinton “a congenital liar.” *National*

Review runs Kramer, where recently he described the *New Yorker* as “malign rubbish” that combined the worst features of the *Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone*, and—believe it or not—the *Nation*. (Full disclosure alert: my book of essays from the *Nation* and *Dissent* was reviewed in the *New Criterion* in 1992; they didn’t like it.)

Kramer today still manages to fill the space in his various venues, and his voice remains unmistakable: the man is in a perpetual state of rage. He says that an “orgy of fatuousness has swept through American colleges and universities since the 1960s”; that the Modern Language Association is “an intellectual catastrophe”; that last year’s Carnegie International exhibition “degenerated into a repulsive rehearsal of anti-social political gestures and the trivializing follies of cultural deconstruction.” (“Repulsive” is one of his favorite adjectives.) This is “disinterested” criticism?

After fifteen years of shouting, Kramer’s voice seems tired. He has less and less to say. His weekly and monthly reviews fall into two categories: the positive ones, filled with vague clichés about greatness instead of articulating his often-proclaimed objective standards; and the negative reviews, the political diatribes, which have become increasingly formulaic. And while no critic in the United States today denounces his opponents more loudly for being “political,” in fact few critics have done more to bring political judgments to bear on the contemporary art world. Virtually everything he writes is shaped by his melodramatic ideology, which requires that he go out every morning to fight the battle for control of the culture, to defend what remains of true art from sixties-inspired degradation. At the Kramer Hilton (the term comes from Gore Vidal), we find an exemplary case of the hypocrisy of the critic who claims to stand above politics. □

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Dennis Wrong

COMMENTARY

AFTER HALF A CENTURY

The year 1995 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the dropping of the atom bomb on Japan, and the creation of the United Nations. The founding of *Commentary* in the same year hardly ranked with these momentous events, but the anniversary did not pass unnoticed in the pages of the journal itself. A special anniversary issue appeared in November 1995, devoted almost entirely to a symposium entitled "The National Prospect." No fewer than seventy-two writers contributed. Only one, Nathan Glazer, then an assistant editor and now a Harvard professor, had been part of *Commentary*'s inaugural issue.

But there have been greater changes than in the biographical identity of the contributors. Nowadays *Commentary* is accurately described as a conservative journal and grouped with *National Review*, the *American Spectator*, the *Public Interest*, the *New Criterion*, *Partisan Review*, the *American Scholar*, the newer *Weekly Standard* and *First Things*, and also with such daily newspapers as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Post*, and the *Washington Times*. Counting the editors of *Commentary* itself, fully one-third of the contributors to the symposium come from the mastheads of these journals. Just short of another third are fellows or administrators of right-wing foundations, the largest number (seven) from the American Enterprise Institute. Of the rest, eight are former political appointees in Republican administrations and one consultant to a Republican presidential candidate, and nineteen are professors, despite an animus in the symposium against the academic world. The remainder include several members of foundations (such as RAND and Brookings) that re-

sist easy classification by ideological tendency, and a few editors and writers of whom the same is true.

I am able tentatively to identify just eight symposiasts who cannot be classified as conservatives. They include Glazer and Seymour Martin Lipset, who were linked to neoconservatism in its earliest pre-Reagan days but have since unobtrusively distanced themselves from it. Eight possible nonconservatives out of seventy-two is far from a representative distribution of past contributors still living, let alone of contemporary intellectuals or, for that matter, of Jews, considering that the magazine is still published by the American Jewish Committee (AJC). Perhaps others of more diverse orientations were invited but declined out of distaste for the ideological stridency now typical of *Commentary*.

The statement to which the symposiasts were asked to respond notes that "many observers," alarmed by "multiculturalism and/or racial polarization; the effects of unchecked immigration; increased economic and social stratification; distrust of authority; the dissolution of shared moral and religious values," have concluded that "our national project is unraveling." The editors ask whether their invited contributors agree and what hope they discern in the current "conservative resurgence, social and cultural as much as political." Not surprisingly, most of them enthuse about the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 and the emergence of Speaker Newt Gingrich as a power in Washington. (Their comments were obviously written before the opinion polls turned sharply against the Republican Congress and it became evident

that the 1994 vote did not reflect a wish for a "revolution" to dismantle the welfare state.) There are, to be sure, some strong disagreements, especially over immigration. Several contributors dispute the suggestion that it should be checked while others, including Peter Brimelow, the writer chiefly associated with anti-immigration polemics, advocate restriction.

The contributors chiefly focus on the alleged moral and cultural decline raised in the editorial preamble. A few of them, recalling the denunciations of "declinism" engaged in by *Commentary* and other conservative publicists in the 1980s in conformity with the upbeat rhetoric of Ronald Reagan, are uncomfortable with the editors' suggestion and declare themselves "optimists," stressing the strength of the economy and more rarely the nation's post-cold war status as the sole superpower. Norman Podhoretz, now retired as active editor, tells us that "about 25 years ago my eyes were finally opened to the wonders of American capitalism," and a few other contributors, including, unsurprisingly, Robert Bartley, the editorial page editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, repeat standard Republican doctrine about economic growth, the tyranny of the graduated income tax, and the abuses of the welfare and regulatory state. Few suggest that the wonders of capitalism might have a direct connection with the roundly deplored evidence of moral and cultural decline. At the end of his statement, Edward Luttwak hints at this connection when he approvingly quotes from another writer: "The conservatives are fools: they whine about the decay of traditional values, yet they enthusiastically support technological progress and economic growth. Apparently it never occurs to them that you can't make rapid, drastic changes in the technology and the economy of a society without causing rapid changes in all other aspects of the society as well . . ." This statement is from the manifesto of the Unabomber.

Most contributors huff and puff about "demoralization" (William Bennett), "nihilism" (Midge Decter, Richard John Neuhaus, Michael Novak), "moral insensibility" (Hilton Kramer), "barbarism" (Roger Kimball), the triumph of

"bohemian values over bourgeois virtue" (George Gilder), the "turning of adolescence into an ideology" (Ruth Wisse). Several, notably Kramer, Kimball, and some of the professors, lump together declines in "morality" and in cultural/intellectual standards as if the high-brow intellectuals of the past had been staunch defenders of bourgeois rectitude. In a gesture of anti-elitist populism, some contributors point to the preamble's worries of "increased economic and social stratification" and blame the new decadence on the "overclass" (a term several contributors borrow from Michael Lind), on "bohemian intellectuals . . . from Harvard to Hollywood" (Gilder), or, most commonly, on "cultural elites." (Only Glazer shows concern over growing class inequalities in their own right.)

A few contributors echo Andrew Ferguson's sensible observation that "it is hard . . . to find any age in our country's history, golden or otherwise, during which a large portion of intelligent people were not convinced the country was going to hell." Lipset coolly introduces historical and sociological perspective to the effect that "our sectarian-inspired moralism inspires public and private efforts to expose evil and to enforce 'correct' behavior and thought. And these feelings and efforts make each generation believe it is living in the worst of times." A similar insight is supplied by, of all people, Robert Bork, who reminds his colleagues not to blame everything on the sixties because "the unraveling of American culture . . . is not a sudden development but a continuation of a trend of many years that was temporarily suppressed by the Depression and World War II." He sees us as having long been headed toward perdition, gloomily declaring that "the confidence and serenity of 1945 were wholly misplaced, though we did not know it then." What started it all he does not say.

The complaints about moral decline are fairly general and scarcely differ except for their more intemperate language and scattershot quality from those often made by nonconservatives, including those in the symposium. Abortion and homosexuality go unmentioned, though crime and the criminal justice system come in for familiar criticisms. Feminism is assailed only by

Harvey Mansfield, who oddly brands it “a form of Marxism” that is “now the greatest blight on our national prospect.” The increase in unmarried motherhood is most frequently brought up, although its recent leveling off escapes notice. Significantly, few symposiasts link its greatest incidence to the inner cities, perhaps because they don’t want to expose themselves to charges of racism, but more probably because doing so would localize the problem, minimizing the general force, fervor, and relevance of their overall indictment, as well as highlighting the futility of mere exhortation as a solution.

One difference from the similar complaints of liberals and Democrats is a pronounced emphasis on the need for religion as a restorative and conservative force. Bartley even thinks that a religious revival is challenging the “moral legitimacy” of the New Deal. Several contributors suggest hopefully that another Great Awakening is occurring. Religion and morality are treated as virtually identical, and concern over the intolerance and even implicit anti-Semitism of the Christian Coalition is usually mentioned only to minimize it. Irving Kristol declares himself “persuaded that a serious religious revival is underway in this country.” I recall one of the first things I read by Kristol, back in 1949—a *Commentary* essay that he has reprinted in his recent collection *Neoconservatism: the Autobiography of an Idea* (1996). Its theme was that the prevailing (1940s) disposition to favor religious commitment on psychotherapeutic grounds was vulgar and specious because “the question of truth—whether we live under God or entirely in the realm of nature—is ignored.” He praised Nietzsche and Freud for squarely facing up to this question. In the present symposium, however, no one suffers doubts about the possibility of religious faith without the offering of an “intellectual sacrifice,” in Max Weber’s words. Religion is treated simply as a Good Thing: an enforcer of “traditional values” and a safeguard against social and cultural “unraveling.” (In recent issues *Commentary* has published articles by a nonscientist author that are critical of natural science, physics in one case and biological evolution in another.

There is a convergence here, though strenuously denied by both sides, between conservatives and the postmodernists they so endlessly excoriate.)

Is it only nostalgia to think that a comparable symposium on the state of the nation in the old *Commentary* would have been richer in content, less exhortatory in predictable ways in its judgments, and marked by a wider and deeper historical sense? These qualities were certainly more evident in their last symposium of comparable size—a 1976 effort called “What is a Liberal—Who is a Conservative?” with sixty-four contributors. The journal had already by that time turned toward the right—a friend of mine complained that the title was biased for suggesting that liberals were things (“whats”) while only conservatives were persons (“whos”). The preamble also invoked the now-familiar pet conservative issues of economic growth, affirmative action quotas, and big government. Eighteen writers contributed to both the 1976 and the 1995 symposia, mostly “card-carrying” conservatives like Bartley, Novak, Kristol, and William Buckley. But there was in 1976 a much wider representation of people on what the British call the broad left (full disclosure: I was a contributor) and even a few radicals were included.

As one who wrote fairly regularly for *Commentary* for over twenty years beginning in the late 1940s when I was introduced to it by my fellow-graduate student Nat Glazer, I feel some sadness in contemplating the thoroughly predictable outlook it has exhibited for at least the last twenty-five years. I recall Irving Howe, like me a contributor in its early years (which coincided with ours as writers), once remarking to me with amazement that *Commentary* had become “more ideological than the *New Masses* ever was.” (I will never forget its review of Truffaut’s movie *The Last Metro*, about a love affair in German-occupied Paris, intended, the reviewer claimed, to soften up its audience for a future Soviet occupation.) It is habitually said that the neoconservatism for which *Commentary* became the intellectual flagship was a departure from a previously liberal outlook—that indeed is what the “neo” prefix was meant to

signify. But the old journal was not remotely as partisan, as closely identified with one of the major political parties or connected to power centers in the federal government, the mass media, and the foundation world. For roughly the first twenty-five years of its existence, *Commentary* could at most be described as "critical liberal" in outlook. It was from the beginning resolutely anticommunist, the founding editor, Elliot Cohen, having had Trotskyist associations. It could never have been taken as an activist voice of contemporary liberalism, let alone of the Democratic party or even of the strongly anticommunist labor movement. As the editor responsible for two marked and opposed changes in its political direction, Norman Podhoretz boasted in his first memoir, *Making It* (1967), it was essentially an expression of the New York intellectual community. That community was preponderantly if not exclusively Jewish. *Commentary* was launched by the AJC as the successor to an earlier journal, the *Contemporary Jewish Record*, whose managing editor, Clement Greenberg, it retained. Contributors to the older journal included most of the leading New York intellectuals, who continued to write often for *Commentary* well into the 1960s.

The New York intellectual community no longer exists: Howe's justly famous 1968 *Commentary* article that gave it its name was essentially a requiem. But it was by no means inevitable that the journal should come to espouse a populist Republican conservatism as if the only alternative, insisted on so tiresomely and repetitively by its present writers, was embracing the ethos and ideological leftovers from the 1960s counterculture and short-lived New Left. As he recounts at length in his second memoir, *Breaking Ranks* (1979), Podhoretz in the late sixties took a deliberately provocative stand against the New Left, which the journal had under his direction previously supported to the consternation of some of the older New York intellectuals. Podhoretz insisted that his aggressive opposition to the radicalism of the sixties was continuous with its earlier forceful anticommunism. I myself contributed in its pages to its criticisms of the sixties left, but it was not long before I developed doubts about the magazine's polemi-

cal excesses and the big-city provincialism of its New York-centered outlook. The equation of sixties radicals with the Stalinists of yore seemed grossly overdrawn: the former, while anti-anti-Communist, were not servants or even consistent supporters of a hostile foreign state, and far from concealing their true beliefs and allegiances were disposed to shout them from the rooftops. The growing use by *Commentary* writers of "anti-American" as an epithet was especially offensive, for in their exaggerated rhetoric and moralistic fervor the youthful protesters seemed thoroughly and even distinctively American. Throughout the 1970s Podhoretz and other contributors increasingly began to apply such epithets to political intellectuals whose views on Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and the New Left differed at the time only marginally from their own, as Charles Kadushin's sociological study *The American Intellectual Elite* (1974), based on intensive interviews, plainly revealed.

Podhoretz claimed in *Breaking Ranks* that *Commentary* was able to criticize the New Left so effectively because unlike the established right its writers (including Howe and I) had "some degree of experience with the Movement" and thus were able to "penetrate its self-protective rhetoric." Podhoretz himself had a real gift for discerning the subtle connections between careerist self-interest and intellectual-ideological fashions—he reported that he had once been called "the Boswell of the *Partisan Review* circle," though this was not intended as a compliment. This genuine perceptiveness endows his two memoirs with permanent interest quite apart from their self-serving justifications of the various moves along the way in his passage to the right and the Republican party. He has not, incidentally, subjected his recent political allies and associates to anything like the probing of *their* intellectual, ideological, and careerist roots he once devoted to his erstwhile liberal and literary friends. This is further evidence of his almost total "politicization," to use a detestable ancient term of left-wing origin. Podhoretz's sharpest insights clearly depended on regular multiple contacts with their objects at editorial conferences, public panel discussions, lunches, and dinner parties. While his and

Commentary's anti-left jeremiads have become even more hyperbolic, his ferocity in print and in person long ago cut him off from informal contacts in even moderately liberal circles. He claims to have been subjected to pariahdom and even "terror" for boldly questioning orthodox left-liberal assumptions, but he minimizes the effects of his aggressive confrontational style of argument, which contrasted markedly with the more civil and reasoned style of Kristol, "the tutelary saint of neoconservatism" as one of the present symposiasts (Joseph Epstein) calls him.

These traits and tendencies were fully in evidence by the late 1970s, but the Reagan administration marked the final break with the liberal past. The end of communism, the goal more than any other—with the possible exception of repudiating the New Left—that had given rise to neoconservatism, has made little or no difference. Nor has the movement of the Republican party beyond Reagan in its efforts to repeal the New Deal, privatize public services, and limit the authority of the federal government. By now there is in place a huge infrastructure of well-funded journals, newspaper columns, television talk-show slots, ties to Republican politicians, temporary and permanent positions in right-wing think tanks, grants and fellowships, endowed professorships, and, at least under Reagan's presidency if not Bush's, second-level appointments to federal offices and advisory boards. It would require real sacrifices for any of their many beneficiaries to reject all this. I have often wondered just what would happen if one of those endowed John M. Olin Foundation professors should publicly proclaim his or her conversion to liberalism or even to views strongly opposed to those favored by today's conservatives.* After saying something like this once before I was attacked by Epstein for echo-

ing the old left-wing charge of "selling out" that I have always disliked. Yet it was Podhoretz himself, in *Making It*, who stressed the attractions of fame, power, and to a lesser degree riches in influencing—influencing, not determining—intellectual and political outlooks. In any case, it is by now plain, to repeat a *bon mot* of mine from way back in 1981, that the "neo" in neoconservatism has finally faded like the Cheshire cat's smile. Indeed, both Podhoretz and Kristol have recently declared it dead.

In his introduction to *The Commentary Reader* (1966), Alfred Kazin described the old journal as "serious, objective, unparochial." As Alfred would now certainly agree, only the last adjective still applies, for the journal continues to avoid exclusive concentration on Jewish affairs. Even in that respect, however, Kazin's reference to a "new maturity and sophistication among Jewish writers" hardly describes the present *Commentary*'s habitual support for the line of the Likud party in Israeli politics, which it treats in an even more predictable manner than American politics. The magazine is a good deal thinner than it used to be and its articles are considerably shorter, reflecting, one suspects, the reported sharp declines in circulation since it became what is now just one of many right-wing journals of opinion. It clearly has not carried with it the larger American Jewish community, which continues to vote disproportionately for liberal Democrats, although *Commentary* writers habitually claim to discern faint signs that Jews are beginning to vote along class rather than ethnic lines. They are likely to be disappointed yet again in 1996, in view of the concern among Jews over the increasing power of the Christian Coalition in the Republican party.

A student of Jewish affairs recently told me that since Podhoretz's retirement as active editor-in-chief, he expected the journal to return to the primary emphasis on the Jewish community that had characterized its predecessor, the *Contemporary Jewish Record*. As if to confirm this prediction, the August 1996 issue consisted of a symposium on what it means to be a Jew today, with sixty-four contributors, most of them rabbis, officials of Jewish agencies, and professors of Hebrew studies.

*I wrote this before the controversy involving Ronald Radosh, the Olin Foundation, and George Washington University had become public. I am pleased to see, however, that at last attention is being paid to the issue of whether a university should grant permanent academic appointments outside its regular departmental channels to particular persons who are funded by foundations of known and pronounced views on public policy.

To hope for the restoration of something like the old *Commentary* is vain, for there is no longer a coherent extra-academic intellectual community for it to draw upon. The very identity of “intellectual,” combining seriousness, cosmopolitanism, rational skepticism toward any and all ideologies and institutions, strong sensitivity to the historical moment, and sympathy with avant-garde art and literature, no longer exists in that there are no longer identifiable persons forming at least loose groups often centered on journals who combine all or most of these traits. *Commentary* still prints a few valuable articles, usually by foreign writers on subjects tangential to American or Israeli politics, but not as many as the *Public Interest* or on most cultural topics the *New Criterion*. Its old adversary the *New York Review of Books* for the most part simply ignores “political correctness” and the cultural left against which *Commentary* fulminates, but occasionally publishes articles criticizing them that are more informed and nuanced than the sort of attacks in which *Commentary* specializes. These are

mostly exercises in liberal- and left-bashing at a level only slightly above that of the *New York Post* and *Washington Times*, for which, indeed, several of the symposiasts, including Podhoretz, have written columns. *Commentary* utterly fails to recognize any ground between its anti-left assaults and the “political correctness” it targets. Yet the number of people, that is, writers, intellectuals, and academics, rejecting both of these poles is undoubtedly greater than those in either camp or even in both taken together. Richard Brookhiser perhaps recognizes this when he claims in the symposium that conservatives need more “hacks,” though I must say I have not noted any shortage in the supply of such types. Small groups, especially when lavishly funded like the conservatives, can achieve high visibility and appear more influential than they actually are when they speak with a unified voice in many different media. If the era of *Commentary*’s formerly high stature as an intellectual journal has undeniably passed, it did not and does not have to be what it has become. □

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Stanley Aronowitz

ALAN SOKAL'S "TRANSGRESSION"

Explaining his now famous parody in *Social Text*'s "Science Wars" issue, Alan Sokal writes in *Dissent* ("Afterword," Fall 1996):

But why did I do it? I confess I'm an unabashed Old Leftist who never quite understood how deconstruction was supposed to help the working class. And I'm a stodgy old scientist who believes, naively, that there exists an external world, that there exist objective truths about that world, and my job is to discover some of them.

There is much to note in this "confession." Why choose a hoax on *Social Text* to make these points? Did Sokal believe its editors were unabashed deconstructionists who doubted the existence of an external world or that they were anti-science? If so, he has either misread the burden of its seventeen-year history or was capricious in his choice or has perpetuated the saddest hoax of all: on himself. For the fact is that *Social Text*, of which I am a founder and in whose editorial collective I served until 1996, has never been in the deconstructionist camp; nor do its editors or the preponderance of its contributors doubt the existence of a material world. What is at issue is whether our knowledge of it can possibly be free of social and cultural presuppositions.

Social Text was founded, and remains within, the Marxist project, which is profoundly materialist. When Fredric Jameson, John Brenkman, and I started the journal we gave it the subtitle "Theory, Culture, Ideology." Our objective was to interrogate Marxists' habitual separation of political economy and culture and to make a contribution to their articulation, even reunification. We were appalled by the orthodox Marxist claim that culture had nothing to

do with burning issues of economic justice and were equally opposed to a "culturalist" deconstruction of reality in which all that mattered was language. The use of the term "ideology" in our subtitle revealed our critical intent. For us, ideology was not "false consciousness" but a form of "lived experience." This marked us decidedly as not "old leftist" because we questioned the naive old materialism that holds that knowledge simply reflects reality. We followed the contemporary Marxist view that all processes of knowledge, including science, are mediated by their practices; for us "practice" was not a mental, but a material category.

So the issue is not whether reality exists, but whether knowledge of it is "transparent." Herein lies Sokal's confusion. He believes that reason, logic, and truth are entirely unproblematic. He has an abiding faith that through the rigorous application of scientific method nature will yield its unmediated truth. According to this doctrine there are "objective truths," because the earth revolves around the sun, gravity exists, and various other laws of nature are settled matters. So Sokal never interrogates the nature of evidence or facts, and simply accepts them if they have been adduced within certain algorithms that bear the stamp of "science."

Sokal cites Andrew Ross and Sandra Harding as representative deconstructionists. Neither fits this characterization. Harding, in her essay on "Why 'Physics' is a Bad Model for Physics," argues that (a) facts do not speak for themselves but are subject to interpretations marked by the values and beliefs of scientists as well as the political imperatives of ruling

groups who fund scientific work. Physics, *like any other human activity*, is subject to these influences; (b) there is no such thing as “pure description.” She cites racial theories using scientific conventions, which have recurred throughout the modern era; (c) “we need critical social theory” to account adequately for causality and other scientific ideas.

At a recent forum on the so-called Sokal/*Social Text* Affair, Sokal readily agreed that facts must be interpreted, but maintained that proper scientific method filters out social and cultural influences in the process of discovery. This, it seems to me, is an article of faith akin to a religious belief. In the history of science it was invoked by scientists as a defense against the attacks of the Church and the state to which it was allied in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and became relevant again during the era of Nazi science and of Lysenkoism in the Soviet Union.

But it is one thing to insist on the autonomy of science from the state—the sort of battle that leading scientific institutions have not really engaged since some atomic scientists sought to prevent further production of the bomb in the late 1940s—and the flatfooted statement that the “objective truth” of science’s postwar discoveries has nothing to do with its alliances with the military. The trajectory that Sokal presents—quantum mechanics gave rise to solid state physics, which, in turn, is the basis of the quantum electronics—is indisputable. What it leaves out is what influence military sponsorship has had on the selection of appropriate scientific objects and on the results of scientific work.

What did science *not* study because of its funding sources? What determines what it actually studies? Has not science increasingly directed its energies in biology as well as physics to technical applications? Is the emergence of bio-engineering, for instance, not subject to political, even economic interrogation? Harding acknowledges, as I do, *both* the liberatory as well as the questionable sides of the history of science. Bioengineering is a case in point. On the one hand its applications fight disease with salutary effects. On the other hand, it may be

linked to a revival of eugenics; indeed, some molecular biologists have declared its relevance to “perfecting” our species.

So: are the uses made of such knowledge part of science? If interpretation and consequences of discovery are integral to the meaning of scientific knowledge, it takes more than the conventional procedure of repeatable experiments or calculations to “prove” that molecular biology is not a technoscience when most of its practitioners have eagerly sought alliances with drug companies and other commercial interests.

Beyond immediate issues concerning the relation between science and politics lie important metatheoretical questions. How do cultural influences—worldviews, for instance—bear on science? It was not deconstruction but the Frankfurt School that pointed to a dialectic of the Enlightenment, arguing that the modern cultural ideology of the scientific-technical domination of nature has direct political parallels. It was not deconstructionists but many historians of science who demonstrated that Newton’s *Principia* is rooted in the mechanical worldview that was widely shared by scientists and laypersons in his time. Newton made true discoveries but, needless to say, they were overturned by “better” truths—relativity and quantum mechanics.

If one acknowledges that the domination of nature is intimately linked to the domination of humans, we can better grapple with racial “science” than by simply arguing that theories of racial and gender inferiority—like those of Shockley, Herrnstein, and Murray, or the nineteenth-century mainstream scientists who held women to be incapable of reason because of their biology—are false. Of course they are false, not only because one can adduce counterfactuals to refute them but because they violate the criterion of humanistic universalism according to which together humans have evolved into a unified species. I would conjecture that this underlying belief informs the widely held judgment that what Murray and Herrnstein have asserted is bad science *as much* as the counterfactuals that may be offered in evidence.

Racial science reappears when society experiences a sense of economic and social crisis and needs scapegoats to explain its panic. But

we cannot abstract the steady drumbeat of these pseudosciences from the degree to which the ideal of *domination* informs all scientific inquiry. To ignore the universal of domination is to fail to understand why, in the face of "definitive" refutations such as Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man*, they come back to us like a stopped-up toilet and in each generation win new adherents, even among some reputable scientists. Nor can we fully grasp the ubiquity of artificial intelligence apart from its uses in the computerized workplace or the devolution of molecular biology into a commercially configured technoscience.

However, I hold that an account of science that ascribes to it what Harding calls a "political agenda" is necessary but not sufficient to understand its tendencies. Among other questions a materialist science of sciences asks are what is the role of laboratory life where, after all, much of science is still done, in the configuration of scientific knowl-

edge?; what is the influence of the power relations within the scientific community on what counts as legitimate knowledge?; and what are the ideological frames within which science is done? These have been standard questions in the sociology of science since its emergence as a line of inquiry in the 1930s. The questions bear on how we understand how science is done, not whether what it does is a "distortion" of truth.

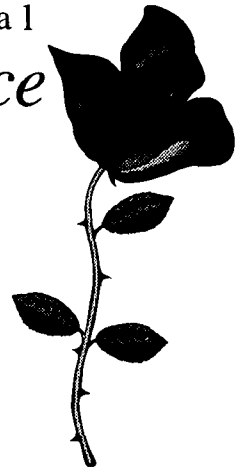
A few examples: Shapin and Schaeffer examined the debate between Thomas Hobbes and Robert Boyle about the nature of knowledge. They put into question one of the underlying precepts of modern science: seeing is believing. Their point is not to deny the importance of observation but to show that its role in knowing is not free of presuppositions, that to show the social origins of observation as a foundation for scientific knowledge is at the very least worthy of inquiry. Latour and Woolgar and Sharon Traweek are among those who have in-

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vestigated everyday life in the laboratory to figure out how science is produced. In their *Laboratory Life*, a study of the Salk laboratory in La Jolla, Latour and Woolgar discerned the relevance of conversation, inscriptions, and machine technologies for producing knowledge. In these and other cases ethnographic and historical studies proceed from Vico's idea that "making is knowing."

The point is not to debunk science or to "deconstruct" it in order to show it is merely a fiction. This may be the postmodern project, but it is not the project of science studies. The point is to show science as a social process, to bring it down to earth, to remove the halo from its head. Scientific truth cannot be absolute; otherwise we might agree with those who have proclaimed the "end" of science. If all knowledge, including natural science, is mediated by the social and cultural context within which it has developed, then its truths are inevitably relational to the means at hand for knowing. In fact, in much of microphysics what is called observation is often the effects of machine technologies, a reading of effects. But the

reading is theory-laden. Which means pure description based on observation is not possible. Scientists require other tools such as machines and mathematics, and infer what they see from what they believe.

To say that the increasing dependence of science on socially and economically permeated technology, the cultural milieux within which science is done or the political agendas of the funders invalidates results would be foolish. What it means is that scientific knowledge is not immune from broad cultural or narrow political influences and its methods cannot function as a filter. Cultural change, as much as internal debate among scientists, contributes to science—social and natural—as an evolving activity; what the scientific communities believe to be the case today may be revised, even refuted, tomorrow. And, reasonably, logically, this must include the most accepted propositions. If this is so, and science reflects on social and cultural influences, on its visions, revisions, and its practices, and perhaps more to the point, on its *commitments*, then there is hope for a liberatory science.

Alan Sokal Replies

I'm pleased to have Professor Aronowitz's confirmation that the editors of *Social Text* believe in the existence of an external world. But I never thought otherwise. When I asserted in the second paragraph of my parody article that "physical 'reality' . . . is at bottom a social and linguistic construct," I wasn't trying to summarize the editors' views, but merely to test whether the bald assertion (without evidence or argument) of such an extreme thesis would raise any eyebrows among them. If it did, the editors never bothered to communicate their misgivings to me, despite my repeated requests for comments, criticisms, and suggestions.

But let me not beat a dead horse: *Social Text* is not my enemy, nor is it my main intellectual target. More interesting are the substantive philosophical and political issues raised in Professor Aronowitz's critique of my Afterword. Unfortunately, Aronowitz seems to have had difficulty in reading my plain words.

According to Aronowitz, "Sokal cites Andrew Ross and Sandra Harding as representative deconstructionists." In fact, the word "deconstruction" appears only once in my article, in the wry (wasn't that clear?) confession that "I'm an unabashed Old Leftist who never quite understood how deconstruction was supposed to help the working class." Later in the essay I criticize some of Ross's and Harding's writings, but as examples of sloppy thinking loosely associated with "social constructivism," not deconstruction.

Aronowitz wants to know how political, economic, and cultural factors can affect which scientific questions are (or are not) studied and which truths are (or are not) discovered. So do I—I raised these questions explicitly in the Afterword.

According to Aronowitz, I think that knowledge of reality is "transparent" and I "never interrogate the nature of evidence or facts." On

what basis does he make such claims? And if I were such a simpleton, why would I have explicitly raised epistemological questions in my Afterword?

But the trouble isn't just that Aronowitz distorts my own positions; it is that much of his essay is based on setting up and demolishing straw opponents. Who nowadays claims that culture has nothing to do with economic injustice or that funding sources have no effect on scientific work? Who denies the value of sociological and political study of science and technology or of the philosophical analysis of epistemological problems? My point is a modest one: that such investigations need to be conducted with due intellectual rigor. The works cited in my parody article provide a plethora of examples of how *not* to proceed. And so, unfortunately, does Aronowitz's essay:

- "It takes more than the conventional procedure of repeatable experiments or calculations to 'prove' that molecular biology is not a technoscience [what exactly does that mean?] when most of its practitioners have eagerly sought alliances with drug companies and other commercial interests." Here Aronowitz illustrates precisely the type of sloppy thinking that I criticized in the Afterword: conflating the issues of ontology, epistemology, sociology of knowledge, ethics, and politics.

- "The ideal of domination [of what or whom?] informs all scientific inquiry." Oh, really? Superstring theory and Cambrian paleontology? Quantum chemistry and lepidopterology? Even in areas of science more closely linked to technological applications—say, solid-state physics—to collapse all of science's social effects into the single category of "domination" is simplistic, to say the least.

- "In fact, in much of microphysics what is called observation is often the effects of machine technologies, a reading of effects. But the reading is theory-laden. Which means pure description based on observation is not possible. Scien-

tists require other tools such as machines and mathematics, and infer what they see from what they believe." This is a vulgarized (and somewhat confused) exposition of physicist-philosopher Pierre Duhem's 1894 remark concerning the theory-dependence of observation. Yes, inference from telescopic observations to astronomical conclusions requires assumptions about optics; so, by the way, does inference from my seeing Professor Aronowitz in front of me to the conclusion that he *is* in front of me. But these optical theories are not arbitrary; they can be tested by *independent* experiments. We do need to make the "metaphysical" assumption that the world isn't perverse—that the laws of optics don't suddenly change when I cast my gaze on Professor Aronowitz—but this is so in everyday life just as it is in science. Our observations are *not* merely encodings of our prior beliefs.

Aronowitz concludes his essay by observing that "what the scientific communities believe to be the case today may be revised, even refuted, tomorrow." Yes, and what else is new? Every scientist knows that even our best-confirmed theories are in general only approximate truths. Newtonian mechanics describes the motions of the planets (and many other things) to an extraordinary precision—and this is an *objective* fact about the world—but Newtonian mechanics is nevertheless wrong. Quantum mechanics and general relativity are closer approximations to the truth—and this too is an objective fact—but these theories, too, being mutually incompatible, will have to be superseded by an as-yet-nonexistent theory of quantum gravity. Successive well-confirmed scientific theories *are* usually closer approximations to the truth, but the exact *sense* in which they are closer approximations is a subtle one: they may get the ontology all wrong. Epistemology at this rarefied level may not have many *political* implications, but it is a fascinating and important part of the human struggle to know the truth about the universe in which we live. □

Jeffrey C. Isaac

THE POVERTY OF PROGRESSIVISM: A RESPONSE TO MY CRITICS

Two brief anecdotes: (1) For two months I eagerly awaited the Fall *Dissent*, pleased as could be about the excellent symposium that my essay spurred. When it arrived I immediately phoned my uncle, a staunch, lifelong trade unionist and a genuine New York liberal. "Pick up a copy of *Dissent*!" I urged him. "*Dissent*?" he replied. "What's that?"

(2) I am currently teaching a senior undergraduate seminar at Indiana University on the decline of liberalism in America. I have placed the symposium on "The Poverty of Progressivism" on reserve. I ask the class if any of them has ever heard of *Dissent*. I expect at least a few of them to know of the magazine, since one of the students is a very liberal Democratic activist and another is a leftist who participated in Union Summer. How many have heard of *Dissent*? Not one. When I ask how many have heard of the *New Republic* or the *American Prospect*, the *Public Interest* or *Policy Review*, the answer is still none.

Why begin my response to critics on such a weighty subject as the future of the left in America with such trivial anecdotes? Because it is important to retain a certain perspective. Our debate is an important one, with serious implications, but it is not a debate about which most Americans care. From the vantage point of American society at large it is a sectarian debate. This observation was in many ways the launching point for my original essay, and it will also be the launching point for my reflections here.

Many of my interlocutors rightly insist that national politics is important, that the 1996 presidential and congressional elections were

important, that federal legislative reforms are important, that the AFL-CIO is important, and that efforts to create a national left electoral politics are important. I agree. I voted for the Clinton/Gore ticket, and for Jonathan Weinzapfel in his unsuccessful race to defeat the ultraconservative Gingrichite John Hostettler. These things do matter. The Kennedy-Kassebaum health care legislation made a difference, as did the increase in the minimum wage. A reinvigorated AFL-CIO under the leadership of John J. Sweeney will play an important role in national politics. Nothing in my essay is inconsistent with support for such efforts.

What I questioned was the overall prospect of a progressive revival, of a broad-based movement for fundamental socioeconomic reform. There are good reasons to be skeptical, indeed pessimistic, on this score, even if the results of the November elections had been more favorable for the Democrats. The premise of neoprogressive arguments is that American society is undergoing profound and disturbing change, that existing welfare state arrangements are under serious stress, and that an ambitious program of interlocking reforms—like those put forth by Michael Lind and Joel Rogers—is necessary. I agree with neoprogressives about the challenges, but I don't believe that there is reason to think that the necessary response will be forthcoming. My essay offered a number of reasons why.

One is the crisis of the labor movement. Mark Levinson offered a clever parody of my argument, but the fact is that the kind of radical worker dialogue he invokes against me takes place all too rarely in the real world, however

frequently it occurs in his imagination. This is a serious problem for neoprogressives. A recent issue of *Dollars and Sense* reported that for the union movement to be restored to its postwar height (of one-third of workers represented), it would have to organize one million new workers a year for the next twenty years—a daunting task, made even more daunting by the fact that such a movement would also have to address serious new problems associated with the mobility of capital and the declining demand for labor. Wade Rathke and Joel Rogers's essay in *Dissent* ("A Strategy for Labor," Fall 1996) makes clear how ambitious a program the revival of the labor movement would require.

I also don't think that my respondents take the full measure of the new forms of media that dominate our culture. It is simply unfair and reductive to accuse me of seeing ordinary Americans as morons. The point is that the kind of rational discourse that the left requires is anathema to the mass media and has been marginalized in our society, a point made not simply by Baudrillard but by Jürgen Habermas and many other social theorists as well. This is a sociological reality, and it has more to do with the forms than the substance of mass communication, which is why, contrary to Sean Wilentz, it is perfectly consistent with conservatives hating the media for its "liberal elitism." I greatly admire E.J. Dionne, Jr., but I don't think that Jay Rosen's "civic journalism project" or James Fallows's book do anything more than register this problem as one of journalistic ethics. What I am pointing to goes much deeper, to the mass-mediated form of our culture at large. So-called "postmodern" writers, among others, have called attention to this issue, and some of my interlocutors would do well to take their writings more seriously.

Finally, I think that some of my respondents fail to take the full measure of the current fragmentation of "left" constituencies. It is true, as Wilentz and Dionne protest, that some neoprogressives recognize this issue—but their treatment of it often seems crudely functionalist, as if this fragmentation could be reversed in some simple way. What if the cultural revolution of

the sixties was like a Pandora's box, and the new perspectives released by opening it cannot be contained? Take a simple issue—gays in the military. In some ways a great deal does not turn on this issue, either for gays or for the broader heterosexual population unconcerned about sexual identity politics. Dionne, Lind, Todd Gitlin, and others see that an issue like this can take on enormous symbolic importance; they know that it helped to weaken Clinton and to sidetrack his progressive economic agenda. The logic of their argument seems to be something like this: the left/liberals/Democrats need to organize around other, more authentic and majoritarian issues, like class, because focusing on gay rights only alienates workers and strengthens conservatives. (Another way of putting this is to say that gays should shut up, at least until after "progressive" or "left" unity has been achieved.) Now, Gitlin et al. are right to say that these so-called identity issues often become hyper-inflated. Those gays who believe that their struggle is the true emancipatory struggle, and that other struggles are secondary, are as narrow-minded as those leftists who say this about class. But how do you enforce the idea that gays should silence their concerns in the name of left unity? Is there a way to do this democratically? Perhaps. The best part of Gitlin's argument is his appeal for common ground and for an ethic of self-restraint. Yet in this narrative it is usually the non-class groups—gays, women, blacks—who are told to cool down. But what if these groups are acting out of a deep history of marginalization and anger? What if their identity issues are as real to them as class issues are to Gitlin, Dionne, Rogers, and Levinson? What you have then is a fractured and acrimonious public sphere, in which the appeal to "progressive common ground" is likely to ring hollow. What's missing from the *Dissent* symposium is any voicing of those issues; the presumption is that some form of class-based left is both possible and desirable. To be fair, my original essay itself speaks only to the question of its possibility. But the "new social movements" that have emerged in the past three decades raise equally important questions about the ethical appeal of a class-based social democratic revival, and in many

ways call it into question.

For these reasons and others I am skeptical about a progressive revival, and I believe that our politics will be characterized by stasis rather than by “progress.” Because of my pessimism I suggest that the most promising responses to the challenges of economic dislocation and cultural fragmentation are partial ones. I could be wrong, and there is nothing in my argument to suggest that other voices need to be silenced. If Joel Rogers wants to organize the New Party, then all power to him. If he ever comes to Bloomington I might even consider joining. But I don’t believe there is any reason to invest such an effort with the profound significance that many on the left imagine it might have.

Is this “attitude adjustment”? Perhaps it is, if one wants to use vulgar and disparaging language to describe what is in fact simply a *different perspective* on what politics can accomplish. Rogers asks what I’ve got “to offer,” and he sneeringly points out that the answer is very little. But that is my point. I don’t believe in the feasibility of the kind of grand strategizing that Rogers practices. He really imagines himself to be an organic intellectual of the left. He surveys the scene as if it were a chess board; he offers intricate and theoretically sophisticated—if unrealistic—analyses of structural conditions and political possibilities, and writes with great confidence about what is to be done. I don’t share Rogers’s confidence about political agency. Nor do I share his idea of the intellectual as someone who is to be judged according to his or her “usefulness” in offering “new techniques” of political organizing and public policy formation. I don’t imagine that history turns on

what I write, and I think those of us who write for magazines like *Dissent* ought to have a more sober and realistic sense of the scope of our audience and the potential of our ideas to effect change in this recalcitrant world of ours.

For me this does not mean the end of politics, but it does mean the end of certain ways of thinking about and doing politics. In his “Editor’s Page,” Michael Walzer seconds my sense of grimness about current realities but notes, correctly, that “what follows from that is less clear,” and that my own “prescriptions hardly seem adequate to the situation” I describe. I could not agree more. My prescriptions—if you want to call them that, for they are less prescriptions than models of a certain kind of practice—are *not* adequate to the situation. That is exactly the tragic bind in which I think we find ourselves. I take no comfort in this fact, but my own efforts to make sense of things have led me to conclude that there is a profound disjuncture between the problems that are thrown up by our society—problems of “our own making”—and the resources at our disposal for their solution. This way of thinking about politics cannot help but be disconcerting to those schooled in more traditionally “left” ways of thinking about “making history.” I know; I’m one of them, and I am disconcerted. Yet I really do believe that the current period is qualitatively different from previous eras, and that large-scale agendas of mass mobilization and coherent social reform are deeply problematic. Wishing that it isn’t so won’t change things, nor will declaring a politics of a unified left bring one about. But this is a debate that should not be prematurely foreclosed, and I thank my critics for helping to open it up in the pages of *Dissent*. □

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Russell Jacoby

POLLYANNA GOES TO COLLEGE

THE OPENING OF THE AMERICAN MIND: CANONS, CULTURE, AND HISTORY, by Lawrence W. Levine. Beacon Press, 1996. 212 pp. \$20.00.

Almost ten years ago the collected complaints of a conservative University of Chicago professor became an unexpected bestseller. Allan Bloom, who had been known mainly as a translator of Plato, published a broad indictment of the character and "soul" of American higher education. The subtitle of *The Closing of the American Mind* ran *How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. To the disbelief of many liberals and leftists, Bloom's volume commanded inordinate attention; and worse, it was followed by a series of widely discussed kindred books like *Tenured Radicals*, *Illiberal Education*, *Killing the Spirit*, *Dictatorship of Virtue*, and *The Disuniting of America*. These tracts decried the incoherence of higher education: its politicization, political correctness, relativism, and faddishness.

Most academics loathed these volumes, expressing their distaste in conversation or reviews, but books that responded in kind did not soon show up. Eventually a few books appeared, yet typically these were smaller in scope, and more academic in prose and approach, than the books by the conservatives.

In this uncrowded field, Lawrence Levine enters with a book that promises to be the answer to Allan Bloom and his supporting cast that many have been waiting for. Prior to publi-

cation Levine's book was heralded in several news articles. "Many liberal-minded scholars," said the *New York Times*, "are now saying [Bloom] has finally met his match." For good reason: Levine is a respected UC-Berkeley historian and a MacArthur Prize Fellow who has written several well-received books on American history; he is a veteran of scholarship and classroom with the reputation and skill to convincingly answer the conservatives. The book sports blurbs by leftists and liberals like Mike Davis, Michael Bérubé, and Ronald Takaki. All signs indicate this book will rout the conservative critics. The first reviews have been jubilant.

Levine's argument is straightforward: the critics of higher education fictionalize the past and distort the present. As a historian, Levine wants us to understand that the critics have sought to "escape history by detaching the present from the historical process." A reading of history shows that the American mind has been "opening" since the early nineteenth century, meaning that it has been moving away from simplistic and monochromatic notions of culture. The curriculum, the courses of study, the ideas of truth, and the student population itself have all become increasingly complex, multi-dimensional, and diverse. Critics, who are "frustrated by the shape and texture of modern America," want to turn the clock back to a time that never was.

In a series of short chapters Levine picks apart the charges of Bloom et al. that the university is going to the dogs. Levine, finding no merit to their criticism, concludes they are shoddy scholars comfortable only with anecdotal

evidence. In fact, the critics have it exactly wrong; where they see decay is the growth of a vital diversity, what Levine calls "a flowering of ideas and scholarly innovation unmatched in our history." The university was once the bastion of upper-class Protestants and their culture; now it is home to a varied population and its complex needs.

Similarly, the charge that the core curriculum has been adulterated is based on defective historical knowledge. The curriculum has never been static. The "classical" curriculum, which the conservatives champion, was only briefly in place. Even a respected field like "American literature" is a relatively recent construction. When Levine studied history in college, only Western political history was considered legitimate. Now the courses and curriculum have opened up to many approaches and fields.

Levine surveys the debate on cultural diversity, arguing that ethnic diversity is neither new nor bad. "Every previous generation of Americans has had its profound difficulties accepting ethnic and racial groups who did not seem to adhere to some earlier model. . . . And every generation of Americans has been incorrect in its fears." For Levine, the new diversity should be applauded and extended; it is what makes America exciting and dynamic.

Levine makes valid points, and many will find useful rejoinders to conservatives here. For this we should thank him. Yet the book suffers from one main problem: a suffocating banality. In the name of history the historian Levine appeals to the tritest historical truth: things change. To this he adds America's favorite cliché: things improve. These two propositions exhaust Levine's book. He is a progressive historian with a vengeance: the world—or at least education—gets better and better. Only a cabal of reactionaries and killjoys cannot appreciate the wonders of American education. Levine, who says he eschews anecdotal evidence, offers his own life as evidence. "[I am] convinced by everything I know and have seen that the American academic world is doing a more thorough and cosmopolitan job of educating a greater diversity of students in a broader and sounder array of courses

covering the past and present of the world they inhabit than ever before in its history."

"Than ever before in its history" is the mantra of this book. Scholarship, knowledge, diversity, teaching, insight: they only improve. Recent historians have "done more than all previous generations of historians combined to penetrate the darkness" of ethnic history. Indeed, much of this book reads like copy for an alumni magazine or college brochure: the students are smiling and ethnically assorted, the professors serious and pathbreaking, the courses engaging, the scholarship profound. If there are any problems, they are momentary, as the transmission shifts into higher gear. Bloom gives us cranky conservatism, Levine saccharine progressivism. "Much of what we have seen recently in terms of speech codes and the like are a stumbling attempt to adapt to this new heterogeneity. The major consequence of the new heterogeneity on campus, however, has not been repression but the opposite—a flowering of ideas and scholarly innovation unmatched in our history."

All this is very convincing for the already convinced—of whom there are many. Levine is a cheerleader at a pep rally for the home team. Others will find that this book goes nowhere. He offers no new information, studies, or analysis. He fusses that the conservative critics just poke about quoting a title here, questioning a student there. "One searches in vain for evidence, for citation, for documentation." Of course, he is not completely wrong. The critics do just scamper around, but the higher education beast is large. How can valid generalizations be drawn? A short answer is not possible, but Levine is no better than the critics. Moreover, his ideas of evidence are somewhat crabby. He objects to a statement by the historian Jack Diggins that a white conservative Ph.D in American history has "about as much chance of getting hired on some faculty as Woody Allen of starting as point guard for the Knicks." Professor Levine huffs: "Diggins's claim was unaccompanied by any evidence whatever."

In the main, however, he simply appeals to the unshakable self-satisfaction of liberal academics. For instance, he protests Robert Hughes's statement that apart from a few exceptions like Simon Schama, Robert Darnton, and

Edward Said, few professors are "writing first-rate history, biography or cultural criticism." Levine objects that Hughes offers little evidence for "this ludicrous judgment of the discipline of history which is in one of its most exciting and original periods." Yet Hughes at least offered some names; Levine offers none, convinced beyond words that his cohort has shed more light than all previous generations combined.

Or he ridicules critics who present "no evidence that writers like Shakespeare are actually studied less now than they were before the 1960s." Levine comes in for the kill: "In fact, the most exhaustive surveys of college and university literature courses . . . provide no documentation for this accusation made so frequently by conservative critics."

"In fact," the single Modern Language Association (MLA) survey Levine cites hardly suffices to answer critics. As with most surveys, the design determined the outcome. The MLA surveyed three upper-division English courses: Renaissance literature, the nineteenth-century British novel, and American literature from 1800 to 1865. Not surprisingly, MLA officialdom did not find significant changes from traditional courses in these areas. Yet the issue is hardly how courses in Renaissance literature have changed; few students are taking these courses. The issue has always been lower-division requirements: what books must freshmen and sophomores read? About this Levine has no facts.

Neither Levine nor the conservatives ask how much reading students are doing at all; or whether the courses at select schools—Levine reviews once again the arguments over the revised core curriculum at Stanford—reflect the situation elsewhere. It seems likely they do not. Most students are taking courses in business management, not introductions to the humanities. To use Levine's formulation, "in fact" the most exhaustive survey of college courses, *Tourists in Our Own Land*, finds a precipitous decline in all the humanities. The U.S. Department of Education study, which examined actual college transcripts of over ten thousand students, remains an eye-opener. The problem is not that students are studying African-American history rather than European history: they're study-

ing neither. Most are taking occupational and pre-occupational courses.

One might imagine that defenders of liberal education might address this reality, but they hardly notice. Left and right prefer squabbling over reading lists rather than confronting the real illiberal education, multiplying courses in career training. The point is not to sing the virtues of poverty and joblessness. Yet for good reason the English word for "school" derives from the Greek word for "leisure." Liberal studies require a space free from the fetish of labor, money, and jobs, a space in which students can pursue learning and reflection. This truth seems to have been forgotten by both liberals and conservatives, who worship work and preparation for it.

Levine, of course, is exhilarated about "the exciting period of growth and discovery" in ethnic identity and history. He confronts the bogey of conservatives, the fear of ethnic fragmentation, but does not mention the other danger, cultural homogenization. The threat is less the mauling than the malling of America, the reduction of cultural differences to shopping and brand names.

Clifford Adelman, who headed the Department of Education study, also points out something that should be of interest to Levine and other liberal champions of cultural diversity—the staggering decline in the serious study of a second language by college students. In all the contemporary discussion of multiculturalism and cultural diversity, Adelman continues, we hear little about foreign language instruction for native English speakers. Yet without a foreign language, Americans cannot be more than cultural "tourists."

Observations like this do not cloud Levine's sunny vision. He offers his own life as an advertisement for ethnic diversity. His father was a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant who rarely spoke his native Yiddish and wanted his son to be a real American. Yet culturally the father did not leave the shtetl, and the son never had to choose between Jewish and American identity: he could have "both Moses and Lincoln." With other Chicago kids young Levine was drawn to black cul-

ture and music—and grew up among Greek-Americans, Italian-Americans and others, “choices and influences far more numerous” than theorists of assimilation recognize. “To understand what happened to me and my friends,” Levine exults, one has to drop simple models of assimilation and adaption.

These snippets of autobiography can only convince the ideologues. Levine does not even give us a hint of what it means for him to be multicultural, a term that easily loses all content. His father remained in a Jewish immigrant world, while seeking to be a real American. In what way does Levine himself exemplify cultural multiplicity? He does not explain this and perhaps cannot. More decisively, most analyses of assimilation use a three-generation model. The test case would not be Levine, but, if he has them, his children: how are they different from third-

generation Italian-Americans or Greek-Americans? Do they speak Yiddish? Do they hang out with *Landsman* in the old neighborhood? And if they do not diverge from other third-generation youth, what is multiculturalism all about?

Throughout *The Opening of the American Mind* one finds the tritest observations delivered as upbeat reports of exciting changes. Throughout Levine courageously defends pluralism and progress, as if they were not the dominant ideology of American institutions and businesses. And not only does Levine have little to say about subjects he addresses, it is extraordinary how much he leaves out. Dinesh D’Souza’s *Illiberal Education* begins with a discussion of affirmative action at UC-Berkeley, and specifically Berkeley’s rejection of high scoring Asian-American students in the name of ethnic diversity. Affirmative action may be the contentious issue for the foreseeable future. Levine himself taught at UC-Berkeley for thirty years.

What does he say about affirmative action? Absolutely nothing. What does he say about the nature of liberal education? Absolutely nothing, except that the curriculum is changeable and infinite. What about increasing ethnic and intellectual segregation on many campuses? Nothing. The increasing cost of education and its impact on students? Nothing. The accelerating privatization of research and programs? Nothing. Poorly prepared students? The rising dropout rate after freshman year? Grade inflation? Deteriorating teaching? Overspecialization? Expanding part-time faculty and unemployed Ph.Ds? Declining humanities? Political correctness? Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Virtually nothing. So much for the views of a major liberal professor on the issues facing American higher education.

Nor does this prize-winning historian have anything to say about the origins or popularity of the conservative critics he wants to refute. After all, Bloom’s book sold eight hundred thousand copies in hardback. Were these readers all nineteenth-century WASPs? Shouldn’t a historian address the widespread appeal of the ideas

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he is trying to refute? In his final pages Levine does ask why the conservatives have been so successful in "casting aspersions" on the "eclectic, open, culturally diverse" curriculum. Why do they label "political correctness," he wonders, what is "the most heartening growth of sensitivity to and awareness of human differences" in our nation's history? Answer: these are displaced people who no longer have "faith in the future, in progress."

Lawrence Levine is not a displaced person. He has been president of the Organiza-

tion of American Historians. He has been a chaired professor at UC-Berkeley, and the beneficiary of the largesse of the MacArthur, Rockefeller, and Guggenheim Foundations; his preface celebrates scores of people, assistants, and institutions. In other words, with *The Opening of the American Mind* the liberal (and, to some degree, left) establishment rolled out one of its biggest cannons to blast into smithereens the conservative flotilla long harassing its shores. What they got was a pop gun. □

Alan Ryan

REPUBLICAN NOSTALGIA

DEMOCRACY'S DISCONTENT, by Michael Sandel. Harvard University Press, 1996. 417 pp. \$24.95.

Much of what follows will be rather critical of Michael Sandel's new book. It would be particularly wicked therefore not to begin by praising some of its many virtues. At a time when many critics of liberalism paint liberals as fools or knaves, Sandel writes with perfect courtesy—and is all the more persuasive in consequence. At a time when the discussion of politics is either focused on the partisan debates of this week and next or else vitiated by an Olympian detachment from the politics of any particular time and place, *Democracy's Discontent* is pitched at just the right level. That is, its focus is on our present discontents, but it sets them in an account of the constitutional and economic history of the United States, and it draws its philosophical and political morals from that history. It is neither a party-political manifesto nor an exercise in arid conceptual analysis, but an exercise in social and political criticism aimed squarely at late twentieth-century citizens of the

United States.

The book is built around a rather simple thought: we live in what Professor Sandel calls "the procedural republic." The procedural republic, as its name suggests, is a set of legal, political, and economic arrangements that allow people to do whatever they choose, within the limits set by the procedures we have in place for reconciling my doing what I want with your doing what you want. The contrast that this implies is with a republic that has a robust conception of a common good, whose procedures are not judged by their success in reconciling each person's pursuit of their own ends with everyone else's pursuit of their ends, but by their success in promoting the common good. A society with a robust conception of a common good cannot regard *choice* as a value; the mere fact that something is the result of a person's voluntary choice leaves it wide open as to whether they chose wisely or foolishly, and whether they advanced the general well-being in making the choice they made. The theme of the book is simply that a society that is governed by a robust conception of a common good is happier than one that is not; the pursuit of happiness, conceived as doing as much as possible

of what we want, doesn't work.

The history of American constitutional practice and the history of American economic life are thus called in to illuminate a story of decline and fall. Or perhaps not quite fall. For Sandel has chosen his title quite neatly; what we suffer is *discontent*. We are not, that is, on the edge of a fascist takeover or in danger of plunging into civil war. What we lack is any sense that we can make collective decisions and then carry them out effectively. Most of Sandel's readers are in no danger of suffering economic want and in little danger of encountering the sort of physical violence that fills the evening news on television. It is the sense of living in a society that cares nothing for the quality of life and nothing for the quality of the individuals who make up that society that distresses them. The United States as a political undertaking could live with this form of low-level dissatisfaction for decades or even centuries. It would have disappointed the expectation of its founders, and indeed of most of its citizens, but it would not necessarily be a violent, oppressive, or otherwise disgusting place to live in.

Sandel's histories of constitutional and economic transformation are slanted toward two ends. On the one hand, he wants to depict the constitutional order as having increasingly set us adrift to work out our own spiritual, emotional, familial, and sexual salvations according to ideas of our own devising. On the other, he wants to argue that whereas once governments thought that work and virtue went hand in hand, and controlled economic development for the sake of citizen virtue, now they care only to give the consumer a good time. The end result is the same; we live in a world where the only absolute value is choice. It does not take a great deal of hard work to find illustrations of this theme, but it must be said that Professor Sandel has put in a lot of work to find some thoroughly depressing examples of cabinet officers, senior administrators, and judges leaning over backward so far to avoid "judgmental" responses that they all but suggest that cannibalism, infanticide, and necrophilia are lifestyle choices that it would be wrong to judge too harshly.

Sandel writes from the perspective of a "re-

publican" alternative to the liberalism of the procedural republic. An obvious objection to the entire enterprise of the book is that the merits of this alternative are taken for granted, and its costs—general moral repressiveness, the imposition of religious orthodoxy in the name of civic cohesion, the blurring of the line between private and public life, the monopolizing of public space by men and the relegation of women to domestic and other forms of supporting roles—are never squarely confronted. The obvious riposte to this, that the repressive features of *real* classical republics—Athens, Sparta, the Roman Republic of Cato the Elder, or the Geneva that threw Rousseau's works on the bonfire—are not essentially connected with the republican ideal of a politics of the common good, leaves anyone who makes it vulnerable to another complaint. This is that they want to have their cake and eat it too. The insight of writers such as Hegel, Carlyle, Marx, and other early-nineteenth-century students of the disasters of the French Revolution, was that this was not possible. The effect of persuading late-eighteenth-century Frenchmen to think that they might recreate the virtuous republican citizen praised by the ancient world's propagandists was to give power to persons such as Saint-Just and Robespierre.

Of course, all societies need a large element of public spirit and a willingness to pursue the public good even at some cost to its citizens' own interests, but in the modern world, it is impossible to ask even for this much public spirit except on terms that respect the private pursuit of happiness, private conscience, the sheer diversity of tastes and interests that modern prosperity has brought into existence. Marx offered to square the circle but only on the far side of the communist revolution, when it would become possible to abolish the distinction between public and private, individual and collectivity. Hegel knew better than his most famous disciple, and offered only to show us how we could accept the inevitable tensions between our lives at home and our lives at work, our aspirations for ourselves and our aspirations for our children, our country, or our profession. The real

republican tradition, as represented by tough customers like Machiavelli, had no doubt that private interest was often and perhaps generally opposed to the pursuit of the public interest; it was therefore necessary for political leaders to know how to crush private interests or to work with them for the sake of promoting whatever project they had in mind. The failure of republicanism in Britain after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 owed much to the fact that republicanism seemed to demand far too much sacrifice of economic interest, and to threaten far too much intrusion into people's private existences.

I began by observing that Sandel builds his case around a simple dichotomy between the procedural republic of liberal political aspiration and the republic whose legitimacy rests on the pursuit of a common good. There is an obvious affinity between a society in which the economy is largely left to run itself according to the dictates of the market and a politics of a largely procedural sort. For the marketplace is indifferent to what anyone wants; and it is indifferent as to how goods are produced. It serves only to bring willing buyers and sellers together, and they may sell their labor, their ambitions, and anything else for which there is a demand. There are constraints, of course, but the only ones intrinsic to the marketplace are those that ensure that buyers and sellers are for the appropriate purpose *willing*. We cannot kidnap the doctor to get his services for nothing; we cannot force the local shop to accept the currency we have just created on the kitchen table by pointing a gun at the shopkeeper's head. (Libertarians, to be sure, think that this is what the government does when it declares its currency to be the only legal tender within the territory it controls, but that is another matter.) There are some extrinsic constraints, too; we cannot buy sexual services from any willing seller, and we cannot sell sexual services to any willing buyer. We cannot sell any service we are not anyway allowed to perform—no matter what the price you offer me, I cannot hire myself out as a hitman. But in a modern society there is almost no suggestion that only certain sorts of people may engage in certain sorts of occupation or sell certain sorts of good. As Marx observed,

liberty, equality, and Bentham reign. Michael Sandel's point is that this is the model to which politics increasingly approximates.

The effect is particularly marked in the sphere of religion. Once we would have thought that the role of religion is to *discipline* the will and *determine* our choices, to provide us with fixed and stable allegiances, a known and predictable character. Now, on Sandel's view of it, we have swallowed the idea that religious allegiances are a matter of free expression. We value religious liberty, not because we take religion seriously but because we do not. Here as everywhere else, the consumer is king, and substantive conceptions of what forms of religious practice are and are not acceptable have vanished. The debate over abortion shows much the same features. We do not have a serious public debate about the meaning of procreation, childbirth, the proper roles of men and women in the business of bringing the next generation into the world. What we have is two slogans—right-to-life versus right-to-choose. On the face of it, Sandel is surely right that there is something very odd about a society that discusses its view of life and death in such truncated terms. Whether the cure for such an impoverished public discourse is the politics of the virtuous republic is another question entirely, but one might readily concede that a society that cannot talk seriously about its beliefs about mortality and the ties between one generation and the next is short of a public philosophy.

To this overemphasis on "choice," Sandel opposes the thought that individuals are "situated" creatures, which is to say that they are social beings, and indeed social creations; what makes us the individuals we are, rather than biologically distinct but otherwise undifferentiated entities, is the fact that we are socially situated. This claim, which is obviously true, has seemed to many critics, and certainly seems to me, to be much too slight to build anything very interesting on. Who, we may ask, has ever denied that human beings grow up in some sort of social setting and acquire the beliefs and aspirations they do in the process of socialization? Even the most enthusiastic sociobiologist, who would wish to say that much of what we can learn in such a process is constrained by our innate en-

dowment, would have to agree that the form our beliefs and aspirations take is to be explained by our upbringing. If liberalism had to deny such banalities, who could be a liberal?

Even Thomas Hobbes, urging us to consider men as if “new sprung out of the ground like mushrooms” did so only as a methodological device. It was just because we are in fact so thoroughly encumbered with our histories that he wanted, for analytical and theoretical purposes, to get behind the facts by wiping clean in the imagination a human nature that nobody could wipe clean in fact. This in essence was the response that John Rawls made to the attack on his “deontological” or Kantian liberalism leveled by Sandel in his first book, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Nobody would or could experience life behind “the veil of ignorance” that Rawls invited us to imagine in order to answer the familiar question of what rules we would consent to live under if we knew nothing about whether we would win or lose from their implementation. Sandel’s insistence that we are “situated” is no argument against such a strategy.

All of which raises an interesting question. Has Sandel laid out the question properly? He writes as though the argument lies between liberals who believe that individuals are in some deep fashion unattached to their surroundings and republicans who believe the reverse. But this confuses two kinds of argument. The first is methodological: what is the most illuminating way of approaching social and political theory? The other is political: are we to side with what Benjamin Constant described as the liberty of the ancients or the liberty of the moderns? Are we going to pin our faith on freedom construed as collective self-government, follow Aristotle in insisting that “the polis exists prior to the individual,” and try to win the battle that the Country party lost in the eighteenth century, or are we going to struggle on with the program of Mill’s essay *On Liberty*? I do not see how an answer to the methodological question can prescribe the answer to the political argument. Nor would those resolutely historical-minded liberals Mill and Tocqueville accept the choice offered by Sandel. They would surely have said they wanted both

citizen virtue and an emphasis on the self-chosen life—Mill was certainly a good deal more emphatic about the latter than Tocqueville, but neither of them was inclined to throw out the liberal baby in order to play around in the republican bathwater.

Indeed, to press this point a little further, it is an oddity not only of this book but of all Sandel’s work that he returns so obsessively to the methodological issue. For it won’t yield him what he wants. Indeed, it won’t yield what this book is after, namely, a new public philosophy. To have one of those, we need something quite other than a commitment to the methodological allegiances of Hegel, Marx, John Dewey, and Charles Taylor—all of whom were (or are) enthusiastic “situationists,” but whose politics are of many different kinds, and in two cases recognizably liberal kinds at that. What he seems reluctant to recognize is that it is just because Americans are situated in the kind of culture they are, and have had the sort of political history they have had, that “choice” is such a central element in American public discourse. This is, after all, a country that not only refused to have a hereditary monarch as its head of state, but insisted on having no hereditary aristocracy either. Few classical republics would have thought they could carry on without a hereditary ruling elite, but the United States was from the beginning committed to trying the experiment.

By the same token, even if only about 15 percent of the population is first- or second-generation immigrant, most Americans are descended from people who came to these shores in the past 120 years. Their whole lives were a testimony to the power of choice. Granted, they often made their choices under pretty rough conditions, but their great-grandchildren can hardly be blamed for thinking that knowing what you want and then setting out to get it is a central element in the good life. It was the great virtue of Charles Taylor’s little book *The Politics of Authenticity* to see that the demand to live a life that is really *our own* is not inevitably and always a sign of alienation but is more often a response to the moral demands of the modern world. The requirement that we should try to live authentically is a moral requirement, and if it appears often in a corrupted or exaggerated form

as a demand for mere "choice," that does not impugn the underlying ideal. No doubt the exaggerations of such ideals cause discontent, but the exaggerations of the ideal of community have caused a great deal worse than that.

If what is wanted is a new public philosophy, it will have to share one thing with this book, but will have to do the job properly. It will have to speak to the particular, peculiar history and culture of the United States in a historically informed fashion. For all the interest of the history that Sandel tells, the way he tackles the task seems to me to miss the target. That is, his concern with the metaphysical issue—are we socially situated individuals or are we free-floating monads—means that the history he tells is excessively slanted. For there is only one meaning it can bear: the loss of republican virtue and the rise of an unhealthy detachedness. But the real history of the United States, like that of any country, is much more quirky than that, and the country's possibilities for good or evil are much more complicated than a straight choice between virtue and selfishness.

What we need is not methodological moralizing but a sophisticated grasp of when rather arms-length and utilitarian considerations are appropriate, when deeper and less instrumental considerations are appropriate, *how* to inculcate enough citizen virtue to keep the republic in good heart, and so on. Old-fashioned republicanism lost out to liberalism for very good reasons—it was repressive, anti-individualist, backward-looking, religiously exclusive, and offered nothing to women. Most forms of communitarianism lost out for similar reasons. People didn't want to stay on the farm once they had seen Paree, and the price of trying to keep them there was much too high for a society like ours to pay. Sandel raises many good questions about the price we have paid for this emancipation, and he raises them in just the right tone of voice to still the doubts of those who think that talk of community leads inevitably to talk of *Blut und Boden*, and that a desire to restore small-town America is a desire to make the world safe for Babbitty. A society of mutually concerned, unaggressive communitarians like Michael Sandel would be a

wholly satisfactory place to live for a great many people. It would not be in any serious sense illiberal, though it would be nonliberal in setting so little value on autonomy, and any passing Nietzscheans would surely think that its moral vision emphasized dependency in a mildly disgusting fashion.

I would not wish to live there myself. But that is because I doubt whether there is only one truth about our kind of society, and whether most of us either can or need to live by only one creed. I do not think schizophrenia looms if we have different moral standards for work and the family, for sexual relations and commercial ones; and I do not think social breakdown looms if different settings demand very different loyalties and responses. I suspect that value pluralism is the order of the day. This hardly lessens the need for a public philosophy, because the negotiation of moral and intellectual pluralism is a complicated business—and it needs an intelligence that is philosophical in a wide sense, even if it is a sense entirely independent of metaphysical assumptions. In that sense, I am entirely on Sandel's side as to the need to raise the level of argument in law, politics, economics, and in the classroom and the bedroom, too. Indeed, at a still higher level of abstraction, I'd rather Sandel was peddling his gloomy communitarian wares than have a cheerfully insensitive individualism win for lack of any understanding of the costs of individualism.

For whatever else one might want to say about *Democracy's Discontent*, it is a good guide to the awkward questions we need to ask as we lurch into the next century, as unsure as ever about how to make the democracy of the twenty-first century a shade less discontented—or at least less pointlessly discontented—than today's. If the historical examples Michael Sandel relies on are slanted rather too heavily toward his own concerns, they raise questions other than those he tackles—questions that a moderately perceptive reader will surely want to

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ask. Indeed, this may well be one of those particularly valuable books that do more good to their skeptical readers than to their fans. The

latter will find their communitarian prejudices gently flattered, but the former will have to think quite hard. □

James K. Galbraith

POP RESPECTABILITY

POP INTERNATIONALISM, by Paul Krugman. MIT Press, 1996. 214 pp. \$22.50.

Paul Krugman's *Pop Internationalism* is a collection of essays, most of which were previously published in *Foreign Affairs*, *Scientific American*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and similar journals. It works quite well as a book. Essay by essay, the organization is coherent and the writing is crisp and relentless. *Pop Internationalism* is an excellent guide to what Paul Krugman believes. It is an even better guide to what he thinks about other people.

For Professor Krugman is on the warpath. He is out for blood. He is after a coterie of public intellectuals, mostly liberals, who believe that the United States has a "competitiveness crisis" and that something should be done about it. This group is not only wrong, in Krugman's view. They are fools. Worse, they dare to write about international economics, a subject about which, if Krugman is correct, they know absolutely nothing.

A chief target is Lester Thurow, whose latest book, *Head to Head*, contains "little or nothing of what economists think they know about international trade." Some "important editors, like James Fallows at the *Atlantic* or Robert Kuttner at the *American Prospect* . . . deliberately use their magazines as platforms for what amounts to an anti-intellectual crusade." Ira Magaziner, Robert Reich, Clyde Prestowitz, Paul Kennedy, and others are similarly bludgeoned. Lest you think I exaggerate, here is a

summary in Krugman's own words:

It may seem, then, that I am asserting that the conventional wisdom about international trade is dominated by entirely ignorant men, who have managed to convince themselves and everyone else who matters that they have deep insights, but are in fact unaware of the most basic principles and facts about the world economy; and that the disdained academic economists are at least by comparison fonts of wisdom and common sense. And that is indeed my claim.

Krugman's basic method is to use small errors to illuminate large disagreements. In some cases this is easily done. His send-up of Yale's Paul Kennedy is based on a passage that does reveal that historian's weak grip on the elements of trade theory. When Clyde Prestowitz (an ex-trade negotiator whose expertise lies in dealing with Japanese bureaucrats) makes a mistake with some numbers, Krugman pounces: "Prestowitz should report the results of his research to the Department of Commerce, whose staff has obviously incorrectly calculated [in the *Annual Survey of Manufactures*]," and so forth. Even Lester Thurow is caught in some apparent sloppiness with a number.

This sort of thing is fair game. Yet the difficulty with the technique, as the foundation of a larger argument, is one Krugman himself identifies: "Everyone makes mistakes." At one point in Krugman's own previous book, *Peddling Prosperity*, he strays into macroeconomics and betrays an elementary confusion between the Federal Reserve's Board of Governors and its policy-making arm, the Federal Open Market Committee. (To make too much of this would,

of course, be unfair.) Against Lester Thurow, my numbers agree with Krugman's. Yet it is still a mistake to underrate Thurow, or Kuttner, or Reich, or the Berkeley professors Steven S. Cohen and John Zysman. To accuse them of being "entirely ignorant men" is ridiculous. Fair-minded readers will surmise that Krugman must have missed something. They will not be wrong.

Let us assume, just for the purpose of argument, that Thurow, Reich, Kuttner, and others are *not* charlatans. Let's take, as a starting point, the idea that these literate and reasonable men (and at least one prominent woman, Laura D'Andrea Tyson, to whom Krugman is somewhat more generous in this book) have been trying to work something out. What are they up to? How did their "competitiveness obsession" get started? What was the point of it all, in the first place?

That story begins far away from the cloistered arena of international trade theory. It begins with the collapse of Keynesian macroeconomics in the United States around 1970, that is to say with the demise of full-employment policy and with the disintegration of macroeconomics into "squabbling factions" (Krugman's accurate phrase). This was a defining intellectual event, for it ruptured a quarter-century's alliance between political progressives and liberal economists in the United States.

Now, a progressive in the United States is a person who, for the most part, reasons from history. She or he believes that the New Deal, the civilian administration of the Second World War, the New Frontier, and the Great Society were the great moments of modern times. At those moments, government intervened to save a collapsing, endangered, or stagnant economic system, raising living standards, equalizing opportunities, relieving suffering and injustice.

In liberal Keynesianism, economics had a theory that made sense of these historical facts. And so, political progressives and liberal economists could form an alliance and did so. When Keynesianism collapsed under assault from Milton Friedman's monetarists and the hard facts of Vietnam War inflation, this justification disappeared. The alliance disappeared with it, but

not the understanding of history that had motivated progressives in the first place, nor their agendas.

The difference was that progressives seeking support from economic theory could now point only to an odd assortment of small ideas. There were theories of imperfect competition, justifying antimonopoly action. There was a theory of "public goods" to support certain kinds of public investment. There was a theory of "externalities," justifying some kinds of social and environmental regulation. But, even when taken all together, these ideas would not butter political parsnips. Their application to industrial policy, regional policy, urban policy, economic development policy (the list could go on) was ferociously resisted, most of all by the supposedly liberal establishment often identified with the Brookings Institution. "Let the markets work!" became the cry of respectability. This was despite the fact that the *theoretical* claim for the social superiority of free-market outcomes falls apart once *any* of these ideas—imperfect competition, public goods, externalities—is introduced into the argument.

Meanwhile, academic economists tackled the mysterious slowdown of productivity growth after 1973, and made a hopeless mess out of that research endeavor. Eventually, that exercise disintegrated into incoherence, with nothing to show for it. Economics therefore failed not only to ally with progressives on traditional aspects of government's role, it also failed to come up with any credible alternative productivity, growth, or employment agenda. Otherwise respectable *and liberal* economists, Paul Krugman among them, were reduced to repeating catechistic formulae: that more saving and more investment, achieved (they said) mainly by deficit reduction, would be good things. This was the same sort of stuff that had gone down in history as the intellectual content of Hoover Republicanism after 1929 (or in Britain, the infamous "Treasury View" of that same year).

The respectable academic economists of the late 1970s could not support their new, anti-Keynesian propositions with evidence; nor have they done so since. Still less could they assemble a political coalition behind them. They were therefore neutralized intellectually and politi-

cally, and unable on either score to counter the real enemies of economic progress, the cut-taxes-for-the-rich supply-siders and high-interest-rate monetarists of that time. The reactionaries ran away with the debate, setting the stage for a decade of high unemployment, upward redistribution, and wholesale attacks on the welfare state. Krugman himself worked briefly in the Reagan administration and no doubt remembers all of this painfully well.

This was a debacle, and the fault lay squarely with the center-to-liberal academic mainstream. That group, which held all the key territory in the late 1970s and early 1980s, would neither fight fairly with the political progressives on domestic policy issues nor admit impotence as a bulwark against the right wing and get out of politics. It was the search for an out—any way out at all—that drove political progressives such as Reich, Magaziner, Kuttner, and Thurow into the trade arena. What else could they do? Stick to scruples when nobody else was doing so? Bah!

The leap to “competitive internationalism” (CI) was made. Suddenly, progressives found themselves reborn politically. Indeed, they returned from the wilderness in an unexpectedly powerful position. For the first time, they could harness the latent forces of crude nationalism to their cause. The high trade deficits and decline of high-wage manufacturing at that time boosted the issue. Book sales took off; media stars were born. The Economic Policy Institute and the Economic Strategy Institute, no favorites of Krugman’s, began to make themselves felt.

The actual political agenda of the competitive internationalists was in fact, for the most part, quite tame. Lester Thurow is an advocate of many things, but above all he favors increased investment in education. Reich’s positions are similar, with a strong emphasis on preparing people for “knowledge jobs.” Kuttner has advocated managed trade in a world where others manage their trade, and Prestowitz’s personal experience leads him to believe that only tough negotiations will open Japanese markets to advanced goods, a position perfectly consistent

with orthodox views of the gains from expanded trade. Zysman and Cohen are known for an “externalities” argument—that there are technological linkages from manufacturing to services, so that there is a case for government attention to the prosperity specifically of the manufacturing sector. Many (not all) of the CI arguments would be defensible in an economy with no trade at all; the internationalist dimension, in many respects, adds pizzazz and political appeal more than anything else.

More important, beginning with Gary Hart and continuing with Bill Clinton, leading Democratic politicians realized that they could sell competitiveness policy to certain branches of industry, notably to aerospace and electronics. Thus, they could forge a winning political coalition. This was how the West, and in 1992 the Presidency, was won. Clinton, as it turned out, wasn’t very serious. His deficit-cutting policy, a great concession to economic orthodoxy, was made possible *because* he diverted (progressives might say hijacked) the political power of competitive internationalism to this objective. The principal objectives of the competitive internationalists themselves, which were to create programs of investment in education, training, and research, were the victims of this early Clinton switch.

Can we talk about the merits of competitive internationalism, acknowledging, perhaps, that winning adherents and making a splash is a legitimate part of political debate? If we do this, I confess to a sympathy, on the substance but not the tone, with parts of Krugman’s critique. Much of the writing he attacks *is* overblown, hyped with martial metaphor, at times confused over the difference between national political status and national economic welfare. Below the level of Reich, Thurow, and some others, the field is clogged with people, including aggressive businesspeople, rather crudely pursuing political agendas—among them industrial subsidies, trade protection, subsidies for training, industrial infrastructure and research, tax breaks and tax reform, even deficit reduction—under the guise of a strategy for “competitiveness.” Yet the link between the only-sometimes-desir-

able policy and the stated goal is often less than clear.

Krugman also correctly reports that the ubiquitous word “competitiveness” has no very distinctive meaning. He quotes Laura Tyson, according to whom competitiveness is “our ability to produce goods and services that meet the test of international competition while our citizens enjoy a standard of living that is both rising and sustainable.” This definition, which originated with Tyson’s CI colleagues at Berkeley, is hard to distinguish from the mundane idea of “productivity growth.” To “meet the test of international competition” is in any event the lesser challenge. The big thing is to get a “standard of living that is both rising and sustainable.” Where trade accounts for less than 15 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), this is necessarily first and foremost a domestic matter—as Krugman argues. Krugman concludes that the notion of competitiveness is a “dangerous obsession,” adding nothing of substance to the debate.

Considered strictly, this is a case that Krugman could win. Yet if he does, political consequences will follow. Progressive causes, to the (arguable) extent they have advanced at all under the competitive internationalist banner, will be set back. Progressives will be forced to find another way to justify their agenda. And unless they achieve this, the milquetoasts and the bond market will be in unchallenged control.

To have to watch good people eat well-meant words would be, in some ways, a shame. Yet it might not be the worst thing that could happen now. Krugman rightly points to dangers in a view that sometimes seems to argue that the United States is threatened by economic growth in the third world, that globalization *per se* is the principal cause of deindustrialization, that the United States is about to be overtaken by the technological dynamism of the emerging nations of Asia. Such views are false. The crude nationalism to which CI progressives have allied themselves is ugly. And Krugman does a service by saying so (though he goes beyond the academic evidence, in my judgment, in pronouncing trade an unimportant source of rising inequality in the wage structure). We would be

much better off, all of us, to agree that the more growth and the more trade, generally speaking, the better. We would also be well freed of the defeatist delusion that the global economy has somehow stolen our destiny and eliminated our options.

With this concession made, what can be done politically and how can one argue for it with a decent minimum of integrity? Krugman offers little in this book to suggest that he has any policy agenda, apart from deficit reduction—the respectable academician’s pop policy. In other works, he has voiced modest support for bread-and-butter public investments: the liberal supply-sider’s holy trinity of investments in education, infrastructure, and research, essentially the same things the competitive internationalists favor but without their political base. But on macroeconomics, he has trapped himself into alliance with a dying doctrine of the natural rate of unemployment—the idea that inflation accelerates without limit once unemployment falls below a critical barrier—and its corollary that economic growth cannot exceed 2.5 percent per year. These positions are contradictory, because the fiscal and monetary restraint aimed at keeping growth below the 2.5 percent speed limit basically rules out a strong public investment program. Faced with the choice, Krugman basically opts to do nothing, except cut the deficit and hope for the best.

In effect, most of Krugman’s own feeble political goals have already been achieved, partly on the strength of the political energies mobilized by the competitive internationalists he despises. Other things he might approve of—the 1992 program of public investments and “putting people first for a change”—were not achieved *despite* the efforts of the progressives. They will stand even less chance of achievement if the Democratic party’s economic policy falls back entirely into the hands of the politically incompetent economic mainstream, which is what Paul Krugman apparently proposes should happen now.

Two alternatives remain. One is to go back to Reaganomics, with a new witches’ brew of tax cuts and tight money. There is something to

be said for this: after 1983 Reagan's economic growth record was better than Clinton's, and if you don't find the spectacle of the rich on a spree repellent, there are worse things than Reaganomics. But of course the spectacle is repellent.

The only other way is to go back to Keynesian economics, a program for growth and justice. Such a return must combine a flat commitment to full employment on the domestic front, and a popular mobilization to achieve that goal, with a complementary commitment to support more rapid growth among our largest trading partners. Global Keynesianism, in two words: a red-meat, pro-labor program for trade and growth in partnership, rather than in competition.

What would be involved? Lower interest rates around the world, to begin with. A real employment policy, including public capital investment and public employment along lines advocated by William Julius Wilson. A still-higher minimum wage. Pro-union laws together with a return to incomes policy in some newly designed form. An international finan-

cial program that stresses adjustment upward rather than downward, while disciplining bond and currency speculators around the world—perhaps through a speculation tax, perhaps through a new mechanism of international financial control.

I am not sure that Paul Krugman entirely disagrees with this approach (he may doubt its feasibility, a cheap complaint). His allegiance to natural rate unemployment theory is not connected to his trade economics (he does not mention it at all in this book), and is perhaps not deeply held. *Pop Internationalism* contains hints that Krugman would prefer a policy of lower interest rates from the Federal Reserve. That's a start—the first real sign of a break with orthodoxy on any point of policy (as distinct from theory) in Krugman's work. One hopes for more (and there are other hopeful signs, in the form of several thoughtful essays at the back of this book on growth in Asia, technology, and economic "localization"). For unless he goes on skewering himself with his own stiletto, Paul Krugman's authority and influence are not going to disappear. □

James B. Rule

UNBALANCED SCALES

ABOVE THE LAW: SECRET DEALS, POLITICAL FIXES, AND OTHER MISADVENTURES OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, by David Burnham. Scribner, 1996. 444 pp. \$27.50.

David Burnham is one of America's most distinguished investigative writers. During his years as a reporter for the *New York Times*, his work with Frank Serpico opened the eyes of the country to institutionalized corruption in the New York City Police Department. His work with Karen Silkwood marked a major chapter in the exposure of the dangers posed by the

nuclear power industry. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, he provided the most searching coverage of high technology available in any American newspaper. His *The Rise of the Computer State* (1983) distilled that reportage into a hard-hitting indictment of the social and political implications of computerization. Working independently since the 1980s, he published in 1990 the award-winning *A Law unto Itself*, a thorough analysis of the Internal Revenue Service and its corrosive effects on American liberties. Now *Above the Law* directs the same relentless critical attention to the U.S. Department of Justice, including its many sub-agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the Bureau of Prisons.

The first thing to note about *Above the Law* is its sheer scope. Burnham has obviously sifted the records of hundreds, if not thousands, of Justice Department actions—and recorded and analyzed scores of them in the text. He has dug into the historical record of the department, way back to the establishment of the position of attorney general under President George Washington in 1789. He familiarizes the reader as much with the technology and management of Justice Department operations as with the legal and political issues involved. And in addition to these more traditional forms of reportage, he and his associates have carried out a massive (and unprecedented) statistical examination of rates of Justice Department activity, some initial findings from which are reported here.

The *leitmotif* of the work is the tension between the relentlessly political character of the department—with both attorneys general and U.S. attorneys appointed through overtly political processes—and such desiderata as separation of powers, due process, and equal protection under the law. The accounts of abuse and manipulation that constitute most of the book leave one wondering how even a vestige of such values have survived in this country to the end of the twentieth century.

Consider the damage wrought by Charlie Matta of Dorchester, Massachusetts. Matta was a crook and an old-fashioned bully. He ran an illegal club that threatened and disrupted the stable blue-collar neighborhood around it. For years, Matta maintained his raucous, menacing establishment, where drug transactions, heavy drinking, and a variety of other noxious activities went on at all hours of the day and night. The neighbors mobilized against him, securing the help of the Boston police. But for a long time, nothing seemed to work. Matta led a charmed life; his brushes with the local authorities never led to a conviction that would get him out of the neighborhood. Years slipped by; long-time residents began to leave in dejection.

Finally, Matta was brought to trial on a charge that could have landed him in prison. But

his defense played an unexpected card. Matta had long been an informer for the FBI and DEA. The feds had helped finance his club, in exchange for information about drug-related activities. Clearly his handlers had had no interest in seeing their carefully cultivated source eliminated. Yet the cost of all this was the systematic degradation of a decent, stable neighborhood.

In the context of *Above the Law* this account is not so much egregious as typical. It is simply one of dozens of stories in which Justice Department officials either neglect the interests of the weak or actually plunder them in the course of pursuing some ulterior end.

The Matta story incorporates a number of Burnham's themes. One is the stunning lack of accountability of Justice Department power. Another is the abuse of such power triggered by the "war" on drugs. A third is the extraordinary personal expense and difficulty experienced by those unfortunate enough to get in the way of these forces. Fourth is the vast overemphasis in Justice Department activity on high-profile drug use and organized-crime cases, as against environmental and white-collar crime.

Among the more disturbing cases he cites is that of the Puregro Company, Inc.—and Jack and Veda Downs, an elderly couple unfortunate enough to farm near some Puregro property near Pasco, Washington. When Puregro dumped dangerous waste chemicals next to the Downs's property, they were so seriously stricken that their health was never restored. Other neighbors suffered nearly as much. The Justice Department opened a case against Puregro, and the company initially offered to plead guilty to a felony charge that could have led to a large fine. Good politics as well as elementary justice, one might think; the region was up in arms against the company. But the feds scaled down their case to the point where the company was allowed to plead guilty to a misdemeanor charge. The fine was \$15,000, small change to a company like Puregro.

To be sure, this was just one case. Burnham acknowledges that no single instance of this kind can establish a pattern. Thus his massive effort, along with associates at Syracuse University, to create a system of statistical reckoning of Justice Department activity—aimed particularly at comparing the work of the ninety-three U.S. at-

torneys' offices throughout the country. Once electronically assembled, these data permit computer analysis of where the vast resources consumed by the Justice Department actually go.

They don't go where one might expect; indeed, it is hard to discern any consistent rationale for where they do go. True, of course, one would not wish for each U.S. attorney to pursue exactly the same legal agenda. One would not expect to find high levels of immigration-related prosecutions, for example, in states and localities where foreigners are rare. But even the simplest analyses of frequencies of different sorts of prosecutions make it plain that something far less reassuring than response to differing local conditions is at work. Burnham writes:

From 1981 to 1990, the federal prosecutors in the Northern District of California, an area with a population of 6.8 million, failed to bring a single criminal case under the nation's environmental laws—the Clean Air Act, the National Environmental Act, the Rivers and Harbors Act, the Water Pollution Control Act and an assortment of other statutes. Although we all know that the people of northern California are a very special and caring breed, can anyone believe that the lumber companies, the mining corporations, the oil drillers and the waste disposal specialists for a booming district with almost 7 million people never violated any environmental laws? . . . The Justice Department's nonexistent effort to develop a balanced, area-wide program to enforce the environmental statutes in California's four federal districts might stand as a perfect example of "ad hocery" at work . . . The responsible attorneys general develop no national programs, the responsible attorneys general make no effort to comprehend what the four U.S. attorneys are doing in the state and the scattered criminal and civil actions that in fact are taken appear to be random events.

This passage evokes another of Burnham's themes—the relative independence of each U.S. attorney from central policy direction by Washington, and their over sensitivity to the political climates of the states in which they are appointed. In fact, though officially appointed by the president, U.S. attorneys are normally chosen by senators from the states in which they are to serve. The effect of these arrangements

on federal justice in the states hardly requires a political scientist to interpret.

Another organizing theme in *Above the Law* is the readiness of U.S. officialdom—from the Justice Department up and down—to bring the full weight of official repression to bear against those whose only crime is dissent—or suspected propensity to dissent.

On August 3, 1948 . . . Attorney General J. Howard McGrath and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover agreed upon a plan by which President Harry Truman could suspend many of the key safeguards of the Constitution. Under the top-secret agreement, code-named "Security Portfolio," the bureau was authorized, in the event of an ill-defined emergency, to summarily arrest up to 20,000 persons and place them in national security detention camps. A watch list of those who would be detained—along with detailed information about what they looked like, where they lived and their place of employment—was developed by the FBI. The decision as to who was placed on the watch list was left to the FBI and included many whose only crime was to openly criticize some aspect of American life. The McGrath-Hoover detention plan did not require the FBI to obtain individual arrest warrants and it would have denied detainees the right to appeal their arrest in federal court.

Note that these plans were laid not in time of war, nor indeed during the McCarthy period. Nor were they simply a personal caprice of J. Edgar Hoover. Burnham is careful to note that even Hoover, one of the author's least beloved figures, generally sought top-level clearance for his repressive schemes—and that he usually received it.

For Burnham, the drift toward abuse in the U.S. "justice" establishment is too fundamental to be ascribed to any one personality or political moment. His indictment is structural and programmatic. True, the culprits are more often business-friendly Republicans than liberal Democrats. But no political coloration provides immunity to the temptation to tilt the application of power. Even the late Robert Kennedy, a former attorney general, and the writer Anthony Lewis—simultaneously Kennedy's confidant and public commentator on actions as attorney general—come in for critical comment.

What sort of response, either in policy, leg-

isolation, or public action, can one reasonably entertain to the litany of dangers that Burnham documents? One senses that Burnham himself is hard pressed to offer any programmatic response. Implicitly, however, there are some promising ideas. One of these might be that we drop demands that the federal establishment do the undoable—notably, win an unconditional “victory” in the “war on drugs.” The sense I make of Burnham’s message is that the concentration of power necessary even to pretend to such an end poses too great a risk to other key public values.

Another response might be to search for ways of limiting the politicization of the administration of justice. Surely it would help, for example, if the appointment of U.S. attorneys could be taken out of senatorial discretion, and if more narrowly professional qualifications could be mandated for attorneys general.

Even these basic suggestions may strike some readers as utopian. Nonetheless, I would like to add one of my own—which may seem to some an even more wishful thought. It would be a worthy goal of the democratic left to seek from the nation’s top politicians an overt and public declaration that abuses like those detailed in Burnham’s book are profoundly wrong and dangerous to key American values. It is not enough that federal officials be moved to *desist*—from time to time—from spying on innocent Americans or undermining their neighborhoods or condoning environmental violations. We need open declarations from the highest officials that such actions are intolerable in our system.

For now, it would seem, even that is too much. Russia can renounce Leninism and South Africa can turn away from apartheid. But the FBI still has its headquarters in the J. Edgar Hoover building. □

Josephine Woll

SOVIET WITNESS

TANGLED LOYALTIES: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ILYA EHRENBURG, by Joshua Rubinstein. Basic Books, 1996. 482 pp. \$35.00.

Finding a good subject is a biographer’s first hurdle, and in choosing Ilya Ehrenburg, Joshua Rubinstein flew right over the bar. What a life! Ehrenburg’s seventy-six years stretched from the Pale of Settlement to the Six Day War, from the coronation of Nicholas II to the rule of Leonid Brezhnev. His lifetime spanned two world wars, a civil war at home and one in Spain, three Russian revolutions, the Great Terror and Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, the murder of Yiddish writers and the publication of Yevtushenko’s “Babi Yar.” Nor was Ehrenburg an onlooker in the events of those overstuffed decades. He was

actively engaged, wearing one or another of his multitude of professional hats—poet, novelist, journalist, quasi-official diplomat, chronicler of his own and other people’s history, interpreter of culture for a generation cut off from its own past.

And what a puzzle Ehrenburg presents, to have survived it all when so many aspects of his complex political, ethnic, and artistic identity seemed to invite disaster. He was no Bolshevik, though he flirted with Bolshevism after the 1905 revolution, when any self-respecting student from his kind of liberal Jewish background had to choose a left-wing political affiliation, and he was shocked to find himself in a czarist prison for several months. But his choice of party was dictated less by conviction than by admiration for his slightly older buddy Nikolay Bukharin (“Bukharchik”) and a desire to rebel

against his father's moderate brand of political opposition: he was, after all, just fifteen. By the time the Bolsheviks actually took power he had another decade of life under his belt, much of it spent among bohemian artists in Paris, and his youthful infatuation was long gone. He wrote poems about the Bolsheviks as "rapists" and "conquerors." A brief dalliance with the Whites, routinely brought up against him in later years, dissolved in the fearful anti-Semitic pogroms they countenanced and exploited, if not indeed organized.

His Jewishness was, given the times he lived in, another likely trap. It sat uneasily on him, never denied yet important almost exclusively as a badge of proud defiance against bigots. His mother's early orthodoxy left no trace on Ehrenburg, though he loved her and did not, as far as one can tell, much care for his rakish and secular father. Unlike Isaac Babel, whose snarled relationship with his Jewish identity included both knowledge of and affection for its traditions, Ehrenburg knew no Yiddish and had no firsthand knowledge of Jewish life in the shtetlakh of the Pale, or even in such cosmopolitan centers as Odessa.

He was a Jew because Jews were uniquely persecuted, and his involvement grew proportionately as the persecution grew. During the pogroms in Kiev in 1919 he wrote articles exposing the mentality ("Beat Jews, Save Russia") that scapegoated Jews. Twenty-five years later, in the wake of an infinitely greater menace, he and Vasily Grossman gathered testimony to the destruction of Soviet Jewry during the Second World War, compiling *The Black Book*, which went unpublished in Russia for nearly fifty years. In 1960, after much effort, he pushed through the Russian publication of *The Diary of Anne Frank*; in 1966, he delivered a lecture on Zola and anti-Semitism, which—though the censors considered it "seditious"—was published in *Izvestia's* literary supplement.

In a sense, anti-Semitism made a Jew out of Ehrenburg. But back in 1921, when Ehrenburg managed to escape the chaos of Russia for the capitals of Western Europe—an escape Bukharin helped to engineer, authorizing a Soviet visa for Ehrenburg months before such documents were accessible—his Jewish iden-

tity took a back seat to other concerns. Ideological differences fractured the Russian emigré communities of Berlin and Paris and eventually strained many of Ehrenburg's friendships, but among Ehrenburg's set, which included almost every major left-wing European intellectual and artist, ethnic and national boundaries were irrelevant. Jewishness, under no immediate threat, could assume the literary form of irony, via his fictional characters; in life, as he later wrote, internationalism was his "preferred nationality." Art was what mattered, and Ehrenburg was writing up a storm.

He poured out his first novel, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurenito and His Disciples*, in just one month. It was published in Berlin in 1921 and a year later in Russia. Scores of articles and a dozen more novels, virtually all now forgotten, quickly followed. Ehrenburg's taste was for modernism, but his talent was decidedly limited. A friend who later regretted that Ehrenburg had "assassinated the artist" in himself was generous; it's not clear there was an artist to assassinate. But *Julio* is honest and inventive, a red-hot satire on European complacency, a modern *Candide* minus Pangloss. The demonic Julio, whom Rubinstein characterizes as "a metaphysical cheerleader for mankind's ability to destroy itself," has several disciples, the most frightening among them the proto-Nazi Karl Schmidt and his ally in Moscow, an unnamed leader obviously modeled on Lenin. Under Julio's guidance the world will be purged of "suspicious elements," particularly the nation that incarnates the spirit of negation, the Jews. In Ehrenburg's *The Stormy Life of Lazik Roitschwantz* (1927) the hero is one of those Jews, a mocking Menachem Mendl whose subversion of all authorities—civil, religious, political—lands him in one prison after another, till he ends in Palestine only to be jailed yet again, this time by Jewish cops.

Rubinstein calls Ehrenburg's vision in *Julio* "startlingly prescient," but in fact his forebodings were shared by others at the time, most notably by Evgeny Zamyatin, who wrote his own apocalyptic glimpse into the totalitarian future, the novel *We*, in 1920. Nor was

Ehrenburg's identification of Jews with a spirit of negation unique, though his anxiety on their behalf was all too well-founded. As the troika of political nightmares galloped through the 1930s, the journalist Ehrenburg saw and understood better than many the fearful potentials of fascism and Naziism.

His relationship to the third -ism—Russia's homegrown variety—was more problematic. Rubinstein carefully traces the process of Ehrenburg's accommodation to a continually more repressive and mendacious Soviet regime. Ehrenburg wanted to stay in Europe, yet he wanted to reach a Soviet readership and to safeguard his family, which meant he had to keep his Soviet passport. The price was twofold. He became an accredited correspondent for *Izvestia*, in 1932 edited by his friend Bukharin. And he became a nonaccredited Soviet diplomat, a bridge between the Soviet Union and Western communist (and some noncommunist) intellectuals, many of whom were old friends. Ehrenburg was unique in his relative freedom to shuttle between Europe and the Soviet Union, and in his almost unbroken success in publishing his work. As the lies and the corpses piled up, however, his unique status grew ever more costly.

Ehrenburg was on a long leash. He spent most of the 1930s outside of Russia, traveling to Spain to cover the Civil War and all over Europe to report on the rapidly deteriorating situation. He also managed to bring his daughter to France for her education (and enjoyed several vacations in the French countryside). But a leash it was, and when the master tugged, home he came. He returned for the 1934 First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, proving his worth by bringing along André Malraux and acting as both chairman of several sessions and translator for many eminent foreign guests. He got away again in 1935, but was back in 1937, after writing his own version of the party's excoriation of André Gide.

That trip home shocked him, the ubiquitous dread and the long list of friends, all of them loyal communists, under arrest. Bukharin's trial was then taking place, and Ehrenburg received

a pass to attend, a "privilege" he could not refuse. His gorge literally rose: he was unable to swallow food, his body rebelling in reaction to what he heard and saw. (This was a pattern: during the Soviet-Nazi pact the physiological symptoms of his distress lasted several months and took forty pounds off him.) He came near to being arrested himself: NKVD files show that his name was given by several people, including Babel and Meyerhold, when they were tortured during interrogation.

But he wasn't arrested. On the contrary: when Stalin refused his request for permission to leave Russia so that he could better serve her by covering Spain, Ehrenburg had the desperate chutzpah to ask again—and got it. He was arrested neither then nor later, and as Rubinstein rightly says, we can never know for certain why not. Luck was a large part of it. Ehrenburg was indeed lucky—lucky to be out of the country so much of the time, lucky that circumstances had conspired to make him a symbol it could be awkward to eliminate. He was useful to Stalin's regime, and he was cagey, shrewdly exploiting his reputation in the West and his links to Western left-wing public opinion, always a matter of concern to the Kremlin. In 1936, for instance, when a few drops of the vitriol splashed onto Shostakovich and other modernist artists spattered Ehrenburg for his repeated praise of Pasternak, he fought back by allying his own activities to "general political considerations. . . . The issue is not whether I like Pasternak, Babel, Sholokhov, etc., but what will more easily and reliably attract the European intelligentsia to us." He used much the same argument seventeen years later, writing to Stalin of the need to provide "a powerful deterrent to foreign slanders and . . . sound arguments for our friends who are fighting for peace"; he used it again with Khrushchev.

During Stalin's lifetime, especially the last phase between 1946 and 1953, Ehrenburg wrote his share of lies on behalf of the Soviet state. Yet there were limits to what Ehrenburg would do, and even then, there were moments of boldness, or kindness, or both, to match his caution. In 1935, his public defense of Babel and Picasso took nerve. In 1947, he called on Anna Akhmatova in Leningrad when she was abso-

lutely persona non grata—an act of courage. In 1949, he employed as his secretary the daughter of a labor camp inmate, a choice both unusual and risky.

The question of complicity haunted Ehrenburg's life and lies at the heart of Rubinstein's biography. It is a question inherently mistrustful, as if Ehrenburg's very survival made him morally suspect: what, the question suggests, did he "sell" in order to "buy" his survival? The most damning accusations came in 1956 from an Israeli journalist, Bernard Turner, who claimed to have been in a labor camp together with Itzik Fefer and David Bergelson, two of the Yiddish writers executed in 1952. According to them, Turner reported, Ehrenburg was "the chief witness" for the state. (*Dissent* republished portions of Turner's account in 1957, as did *Le Monde*.) The story is nonsense, and Rubinstein makes appropriately short shrift of it, but it dogged Ehrenburg's footsteps, testimony not to any actual guilt but to the suspicions inevitably engendered by his ambiguous position.

Rubinstein is no apologist for Ehrenburg, though he occasionally confuses physical survival with material rewards, as when he comments that Ehrenburg's compliance—he had just lied to friends at the World Peace Congress in 1949 about the fates of Peretz Markish and Solomon Mikhols—"was the price for his survival." He compares Ehrenburg's obsequious flattery of Stalin, in 1951, with Mandelstam's attempt to save his life by writing an "Ode to Stalin" in 1936, and Akhmatova's attempt to save her son in 1947: the stakes were not the same. On balance, however, he rates the sum of the compromises as less than the sum of accomplishments, and he makes a good case for his bookkeeping.

Rubinstein's mastery of the many aspects of Ehrenburg's "life and times" is unrivaled, and he presents this spider web of people and places, politics and art, with admirable clarity. He abstains from probing too deeply into Ehrenburg's psyche, preferring to present actions and allow readers to infer motives. In my own case I came to a couple of conclusions, however speculative, about Ehrenburg's choices.

Ehrenburg seems to me to have been driven by two overriding considerations. One was fear,

the other friendship. Friends were Ehrenburg's family: he cared deeply for them and sustained his relationships with them for decades. But from the mid-1930s until Stalin's death, Ehrenburg was deeply afraid. The Second World War made his name literally a household word, but as long as Stalin lived nothing was stable and no one secure. If (more) proof were needed, it came in the last weeks of the war, when Stalin's strategy vis-à-vis Germany, especially the Eastern Zone, had altered. Harsh anti-German rhetoric was no longer timely, and Ilya Ehrenburg—the Soviet Union's most famous and most popular war correspondent—was unable to publish his articles in the press. The postwar years were still worse, as the Zhdanovshchina clamped down on artists and the antic cosmopolitan campaign targeted Jews.

After March 1953, Ehrenburg's overpowering fear vanished. The post-Stalin leadership could be nasty, they could be brutal, they could defer or prevent publication of Ehrenburg's work, they could demand cuts or changes, they could make it hard for him to travel—but they would not arrest him and they would not kill him. The harm they were prepared to do was, though irritating and humiliating, relatively trivial. And once the vise of fear loosened, friendship surged back, as did Ehrenburg's guilt for the years when he was free and successful, collecting kudos and cars while his friends—most of them, as he well knew, far greater artists than he—were disappearing. From 1953 until he died, he paid his debts of friendship, making restitution by bringing to the attention of an avid public the names, the works, and the fates of scores of writers and artists.

For their sake he wrote his multivolume memoir, *People, Years, Life*, the book that precipitated his final battles with the regime. Censorship notwithstanding, Ehrenburg's memoirs opened a tightly shut window onto the Soviet past, and Rubinstein does not overstate when he calls the memoir "an attempt to restore the country's cultural history." Ehrenburg wrote too of the "conspiracy of silence," engendered by terror, on which rested the whole Stalinist edifice. For this, even more than for reviving

"mouldering literary corpses" (in the words of one hardline critic), Ehrenburg incurred the wrath of political and cultural watchdogs, and they did their best to make his last years as miserable as possible.

One cannot avoid judging Ehrenburg's behavior. More than this: while never forgetting the safety created by decades and distance, one *ought* not avoid judging and at times condemning him. Yet it is perhaps his friends, loyal to him as he was to them, who should have the last word in assess-

ing Ilya Ehrenburg. In 1963, Ehrenburg was despondent over Khrushchev's strident condemnation of the memoirs. Nadezhda Mandelstam, an implacable critic of her peers, offered him comfort: "People always wanted the impossible from you and were angry when you did the possible. Now . . . it is obvious how much you did and are doing to relax our usual ways, how great your role is in our life and how we should be grateful to you . . . I am happy to tell you this and to shake your hand." □

Richard Wolin

DEMOCRACY AND "DISTINCTIVE STATUS"

A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights

MULTICULTURAL CITIZENSHIP, by Will Kymlicka. Oxford University Press, 1995. 296 pp., \$35.

In recent years there has been a profusion of interest in the concept of citizenship—a development that is far from surprising. In her classic study *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt, writing in the aftermath of a world war that had left twelve million people displaced, observed that twentieth-century history had proved that the "rights of man" were meaningless unless they could be enforced by national governments. Last April the *New York Times* featured the tragic story of a young woman from Togo who fled to the United States to escape ritual genital mutilation, only to be kept in a holding cell for illegal immigrants, incommunicado and under abominable conditions, for nearly two years. Because as an asylum-seeker she was without civil rights in this country, she had very little legal or practical recourse. It is in large measure owing to such cases, which may well number in the millions, that the question of citizenship, which often defines who in

today's world are the beneficiaries of rights to life, liberty, and economic well-being, has assumed center stage in contemporary political thought.

In *Multicultural Citizenship*, Will Kymlicka pursues a different tack. It is not so much questions of international borders or immigration that concern him. Instead, he attempts to reconcile two major positions in contemporary political theory that are often viewed as irreconcilably opposed: the so-called communitarian position, which emphasizes the priority of traditional ways of life and cultural identities, against a liberal legalistic perspective stressing the primacy of individual "rights." The latter position, of course, has been the bread and butter of American political traditions, and in recent decades has received compelling theoretical buttressing via the work of John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin. Yet, this rights-oriented outlook seems increasingly inadequate in the face of powerful forces of economic and bureaucratic fragmentation that are inherently destructive of tradition and local cultures.

Kymlicka seeks to reconstruct an ideal of citizenship that will do justice to these questions of individual and collective identity. His inter-

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esting gambit is to abandon the dichotomy between communitarianism and liberalism. Instead, he wishes to reconcile the best that both positions have to offer. His basic argument is that the orientation of traditional liberalism toward individual rights needs to be supplemented with theories of *group* prerogatives or rights so that social groups that are at a structural or historical disadvantage in relation to the larger culture might flourish or come into their own; a requirement, Kymlicka argues, that is unlikely to be realized if one continues to rely on culture-blind and highly formalized doctrines of right.

Kymlicka draws on the experiences of Native Americans, African-Americans, and immigrant groups in order to explore these questions. The case of indigenous peoples who were conquered and subdued against their will is a special and compelling instance. In the United States, constitutional guarantees of freedom of contract have been suspended in the case of Native Americans in order to preserve the inalienability of tribal lands. For Kymlicka this is a paradigmatic example of the ways in which considerations of right must at times cede to the requirement of preserving endangered cultural identities. He also mentions the case of the Pennsylvania Amish, who have been exempted from certain laws concerning the mandatory education of children so that they might preserve their traditional way of life. He invokes the fact that in some countries Jews and Muslims are absolved on religious grounds from mandatory Sunday closings. Elsewhere, Sikhs have been exempted from motorcycle helmet laws so that they might wear their traditional turbans.

Of course, most of these examples are uncontroversial. They constitute legal exceptions that leave the overall liberal balance between habitual "forms of life" and "rights" intact. But it would be unwise to make a common practice of circumventing legal or constitutional provisions, in which case the latter would soon become meaningless. Such exemptions must only be granted therefore in exceptional cases, where substantial moral and restitutive considerations come into play (the case of Native Americans), or where religious practices can be accommodated without disregard of basic human liberties. The maintenance of cultural in-

tegrity must not function at the expense of individual claims to freedom, self-development, and choice. Thus, none of the national minorities or religious groups in question possesses the prerogative of depriving individual members of the right to leave the community.

On all of these points, Kymlicka's analyses are lucid and compelling. At the same time, one occasionally gets the feeling that he has reinvented the wheel. After all, liberal constitutional regimes themselves have willingly granted these legal exceptions. Thus far, Kymlicka has merely pointed out what has already been well documented.

But these caveats fail to do justice to the implicit radicalism of Kymlicka's account. The more interesting—and risky—part of his argument pertains to more ambitious models of group prerogatives. In this respect, the Canadian dilemma of a state comprising two nationalities—Anglo and Québécois—is exemplary. And a good deal of Kymlicka's argument derives from the (far from unproblematic) Quebec example. He remarks approvingly: "Under the federal division of powers in Canada, the province of Quebec (which is 80 percent francophone) has extensive jurisdiction over issues that are crucial to the survival of the French culture, including control over education, language, culture, as well as significant immigration policy." Elsewhere he observes: "The right of the Québécois to preserve and promote their culture, affirmed in the existing system of federalism, is yet a fourth case [of group-differentiated citizenship]: it is exercised by the province of Quebec, whose citizens are predominantly Québécois, but also includes many non-francophones."

But the case of Quebec does not provide a ringing endorsement of Kymlicka's claims about the imperatives of multicultural citizenship. The province's cultural integrity is hardly threatened with extinction, as it perhaps was before the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s; yet its draconian language laws—all commercial and public signs must be in French; francophone Quebecers are constitutionally forbidden from sending their children to English-speaking public schools;

firms with fifty or more employees must conduct their business in French—far from being a model of enlightened multiculturalism, border on intolerance and reverse discrimination, this time against an Anglo minority culture concentrated in Montréal. The extremes of policing of this strict language legislation have reached tragicomic proportions. As Michael Ignatieff observes in *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*:

Québécois think of their language as a kind of invisible shield protecting their cultural integrity from the North American norm. The French language allows Québécois a degree of cultural self-assurance toward the Americans that English Canadians can only envy. Yet the same Québécois display none of the same self-assurance in relation to their own non-French-speaking minority The language police are dispatched to happily bilingual towns in the Eastern Townships to photograph tiny English cardboard signs in corner stores. Storekeepers are prosecuted, much to the irritation of bilingual Anglophones and Francophones alike. There is a pettiness in language politics that belies the cultural self-confidence the Québécois project about their capacity to survive and flourish.

A few years ago, the Meech Lake accords granting “distinctive status” to Quebec were voted down after an acrimonious debate and much resentment on the part of English-speaking Canada. The entire experience compels one to wonder whether the idea of legislating cultural distinctiveness and corresponding group prerogatives doesn’t amount to abetting cultural insularity and parochialism. In the case at hand, a better solution might be to continue to emphasize Quebec’s historical uniqueness at the *cultural* level via festivals, days of remembrance, curricular provisions, and so forth and to refrain from institutionalizing it in legal-constitutional terms, which, as recent experience strongly suggests, represents a source of keen antagonism and discomfiture.

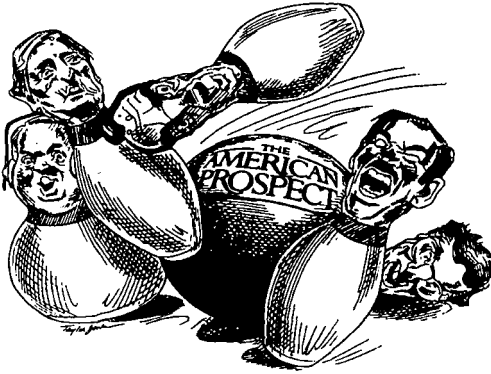
In more general terms, Quebec raises so many questions about Kymlicka’s arguments for the legal sanctification of group identity and multicultural ends that one is given to wonder: is he not tugging at the wrong end of the thread? Kymlicka even admits at one point that in the

aftermath of the Quiet Revolution Quebec has progressed from a “rural, Catholic, conservative, and patriarchal” culture to a new more cosmopolitan identity. As a result of this dramatic cultural shift, which effaced many residues of provincialism and parochialism, the Québécois have in essence become (though some would be loath to admit it) *good North Americans*. By Kymlicka’s own avowal this move in the direction of cosmopolitanism is a step in the right direction.

Certainly there are cases in which the granting of home rule or limited political autonomy is merited, usually as a response to past cultural usurpation or oppression. However, unless all such instances are informed by a higher conception of “right” (in Dworkin’s parlance: by matters of *principle*)—a conception that is diametrically opposed to the hallowing of ethnic or national particularism—there are few guarantees that the results will not prove morally regressive, as the former Yugoslavia demonstrates well.

The linchpin of Kymlicka’s argument for the necessity of group rights is contained in his chapter on “Freedom and Culture.” There, he seeks to revise the formal definition of freedom commonly associated with the liberal tradition by supplementing it with a strong culturalist dimension. Kymlicka argues that an essential precondition of freedom entails the capacity to act in accordance with and realize the terms of one’s own cultural tradition. In this way, he tries to reconcile a concept of the good life or the good society proper to communitarian thought with liberal claims to individual autonomy. Kymlicka’s argument tends to confuse freedom with individual fulfillment or self-realization. And while self-realization may well be essential for a well-rounded life, or what the Greeks referred to as human flourishing (*eudaimonia*), there is nothing to prevent such an ideal from operating at cross-purposes with the moral demands of justice, which are based on the egalitarian precept that all human natures are of equal worth. Thus, I can easily “realize myself” or flourish at the expense of other cultures, or by usurping their own claims to autonomy; but I

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cannot thereby be considered just.

In general, Kymlicka underestimates the extent to which particularistic cultural identities and moral autonomy may clash. Cultural identity often refers to a network of fixed, inherited belief structures. The more they are called into question, the more the inheritance tends to dissolve. The claims of human autonomy, conversely, imply that beliefs should not be accepted merely because they have been inherited per se, but must be legitimated through criticism and reflection.

In addition, the definition of culture employed by Kymlicka, on which so much of his argument hinges, is much too static. In the modern world people increasingly move between various cultures, walks of life, and social roles. Cultural traditions shed their insularity. The

onset of a "world society," abetted by global media and the rationalizing tendencies of the economy (to be sure, far from innocent developments), render local cultures much less all-encompassing. The spread of higher education, too, facilitates individual choice at the expense of established ways of life. Finally, the ends of democratic citizenship, which have been revived in the aftermath of communism's collapse, entail a constitutional patriotism—a patriotism of principle—that cannot be reduced to values of nationality or culture in the narrow Herderian sense.

At one point, Kymlicka seemingly answers his own question about the benefits of cultural versus cosmopolitan allegiances, when he observes that "as a culture is liberalized—and so allows members to question and reject tradi-

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tional ways of life—the resulting cultural identity becomes both ‘thinner’ and less distinctive. That is, as a culture becomes more liberal, the members are less and less likely to share the same substantive conception of the good life, and more and more likely to share basic values with people in other liberal cultures.”

Kymlicka’s main thesis, that “group-differentiated rights that protect minority cultures can be seen, not only as consistent with liberal values, but as actually promoting them,” carries a considerable burden of proof. And in the end, one cannot help but doubt whether this burden has been met. At one point he quotes approvingly the philosopher Yael Tamir’s claim that national identity “lies outside the normative sphere.” Yet, if this is so, then it would seem that national identity and democratic principles would operate at cross-purposes. For whereas democratic norms require principled legitimization, the nonreflective solidarities of national cultures benefit from passive and unquestioning acceptance.

In sum, the rigid opposition established in communitarian discourse between rights, which are formal, and forms of life, which are substantive, must be deconstructed. More specifically, they must be mediated by a third term: democratic citizenship. A well-functioning democracy in which minorities and oppressed groups can publicly articulate their concerns and assert their cultural identities is the logical solvent for the misleading antithesis between individual rights and the integrity of cultures. Consider the case of social movements involving feminists, gays, and civil rights for African-Americans. All of these groups have struggled

to articulate their plights in the spotlight of a democratic public sphere in order to convince a majority culture—predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon, and male-dominated—that its purported egalitarian precepts were seriously lagging behind social realities. In all of these cases, the gap between constitutional avowals of equality and the de facto disenfranchisement of social groups has been an important stimulus toward progressive change. To be sure, the requisite changes have not yet gone far enough. Yet Kymlicka’s solution—the legal enfranchisement of cultural difference—could well prove counter-productive. It proceeds in a direction opposite from that of democratic citizenship: toward the entrenchment of difference, with all the attendant problems of particularism and ghettoization. Before proceeding too far down the path he recommends, one should give the potentials of a democratic public culture another try. □

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Proposals, ideas, and especially suggestions for other places of publication of this Call are welcome. Please contact Walter Gruenzweig, GRUENZWE@MAIL.FB15.UNI-DORTMUND.DE (Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, FB15, Universität Dortmund, D-44221 Dortmund, Germany).

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'I shall go to the Congo', Guevara said, 'because it is the hottest spot in the world now... I think we can hurt the imperialists at the core of their interests in Katanga.' Nasser was astonished, warning Guevara not to become 'another Tarzan, a white man among black men, leading them and protecting them... It can't be done.'

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Affordable Amtrak?

Editors:

Will Joseph Blasi's glorification of shareholding as a solution for Amtrak's problems ("Saving Amtrak," Fall 1996) make its service available to those who need it at a price they can afford? I doubt it. The public will be expected to support this humongous array of managers, consultants, technicians, and the necessary rolling stock, and on top of that, the shareholders, by fares paid at the ticket office, and set by whatever a "for-profit" passenger rail service will demand. Those unable to afford the fare will be excluded from the service, though their need may be as great as that of those who can afford it.

If the best available service can be provided at an affordable price and still prove profitable, well and good, and a maximum profitability should be sought so long as the need is served equitably; but where there's a need, provision should be made to satisfy it, profitable or not. The motive to shareholding is acquisitiveness—in plain English, greed, an insatiable addiction that, given its head, will leave the interest of the consuming public at the bottom of the market's agenda. Accountability for the provision of the service will be in the hands of the shareholders, not those whose need of it should be the primary consideration. A genuinely democratic, which is to say, a non-coercive, economic system will put need before greed

R. A. ATHEARN
Friday Harbor, Wash.

Joseph Blasi Replies:

The writer is creating a litany of complaints of which today's situation is the true cause. And he is romanticizing an anti-corporate, anticapitalist sensibility. I am not sure where that gets us. Amtrak is today a humongous array of managers, consultants, technicians, and the resulting rolling stock that is going in the wrong direction. It is precisely the lack of owners with large economic and social incentives that are independent of the state that holds back this current collection of people from solving Amtrak's problems. Amtrak today increases prices and victimizes people who are unable to pay or who are cut off when it continually cuts back services in all areas except where there is heavy travel, such as the Northeast Corridor. Amtrak is not equitable today, nor efficient. On the contrary, its subsidies misuse taxpayer money in order to accomplish a de-

clining service. The company has the worst elements of a nonprofit and a for-profit corporation. As a nonprofit entity, it gets to lean on the state for its incompetence, and as a for-profit entity, it gets to cut service and increase fares but without the competition that would respond to the desire of many citizens for more rather than less rail service.

I share both the writer's general distaste for greed and his concern that the public must have its needs taken into consideration. But how do his ideas help us resolve the practical problem that the government refuses to subsidize or run Amtrak the way that the Swiss or the Dutch do and that Amtrak lacks the incentives to expand passenger rail service like a hungry privatized company? Let me be more blunt than in the original article. Some of Amtrak's managers and employees are trying to do many things right under its current structure, but the company cannot shake the fundamental similarity to a state-owned enterprise in a communist system. The last time I looked, neither Amtrak nor state-owned and subsidized enterprises under communist systems were democratic and attentive to consumer needs. We have decades of evidence that state-owned enterprises in scores of countries were inefficient. We do have evidence that states can run efficient railroads if they have the political will, but the United States does not have that. Will Athearn wake up from his sleep? Think about what has happened in the socialistic economic world since the late eighties. We need practical solutions to ongoing failures. The proposal to privatize Amtrak is surely not perfect. However, it tries to take into account the realities that we confront. I really believe that a state-owned Amtrak under the current regimes will be worse than a privatized Amtrak. Too many people have a short-term interest in avoiding this discussion. One need not look only at future issues of *Dissent* to find evidence on this debate. This is an argument that the entire country can resolve by watching the evidence roll by or not roll by as the years pass. □

To Letter Writers

• We welcome succinct letters from our readers. But because we have a long "lead time" for each issue, you have to send us your letter within three weeks after getting an issue of *Dissent* in order to get it into the next issue. So if you want to write about something that you like, or dislike, in or about *Dissent*, please do it quickly.

The Last Page

The view from Seats 17 and 18, Row G, Main Section 26, down the left-field line at Yankee Stadium, is terrible. The left-fielder, when not obscured by the foul pole, is the only player who is easily recognizable. Everyone and everything else looks skewed, making it hard to follow the simplest of plays. But even if our seats were lousy, this *was* the World Series, and my son James and I were in the park.

We were there because of a long-ago good turn. In 1985, at a time when my spirits were low, a concerned friend got me to split the price for two upper-deck, box-seat season tickets to the Stadium, right behind home plate. Not for every game on the schedule, but for all the Sunday afternoons, plus Opening Day and a few other holiday games. For a couple of hundred bucks, I'd at least get out of the house regularly all summer long, enjoy the sunshine, and, maybe, cheer up. What's more, the tickets guaranteed that my friend and I could purchase seats for all playoff and World Series games at the Stadium, should the Yankees advance to post-season play.

I did cheer up, even though the Yankees, a talented team that year, just missed making the playoffs. The cycle of high hopes and ultimate disappointments repeated itself over the next few seasons, and my friend moved to California—but I kept re-ordering the tickets and introduced James to baseball and the Bronx. We saw some excellent Yankee players, including Don Mattingly (his favorite) and Rickey Henderson (mine). We made new friends, as the same people turned up in the rows around us, Sunday after Sunday, year after year. Eventually, in the late eighties and early nineties, the Yankees' fortunes worsened; and James, like many boys of his generation, began preferring basketball to baseball, leaving me to attend the games with others. But I'd become a real fan.

Most of the highbrow clichés about loving

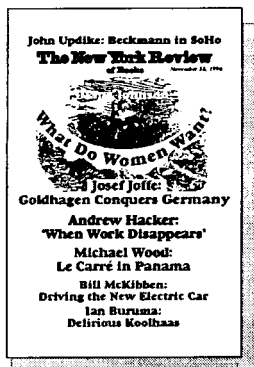
baseball—about the democracy of fandom, or about the game's singular narrative quality—are true enough. One of the truest, for me, has to do with a sense of place—not only the generic pleasures of hanging around an emerald ball field, but the specific pleasures of returning to the same grand stadium, with its view beyond the bleachers of the Bronx County Court House and the tenements and the el-line—pretty much the same view as when Joe DiMaggio played center field. There's some escapist fantasy to this, no doubt, screening out the Bronx's sorrows and dangers. But there is also a reassuring sense of continuity, in a city where almost nothing lasts. During the years when the Yankees were truly bad, I got through the middle innings of some awful Sunday games mainly by taking in that old and unchanging view. Somehow, it kept me cheered up.

This season, there was a lot more to enjoy. Not only were the Yankees good, they were amazingly lucky. Never before has whim—freak plays, fan interference, bad calls by the umpires—operated so regularly and decisively on behalf of a cause that I supported. And so, there I was, on a chilly night in late October, not in my regular seat (which I imagine went to some corporate mogul), but in the ballpark nonetheless, with James hugging me, his excitement in baseball revived, straining to watch the final out of the Series recorded—and then cheering a championship that we'd never come close to cheering before. As the Yankees pranced around celebrating, I caught a glimpse, from my lousy seat, of the el rumbling by in the distance, and I thought of what a crime it will be if, as looks likely, the Yankees one day abandon this place. It's not just because of the team's newly restored glory. As wonderful as this moment is, there are bound to be hard times again, when the old surroundings would be as encouraging as ever.

SEAN WILENTZ □

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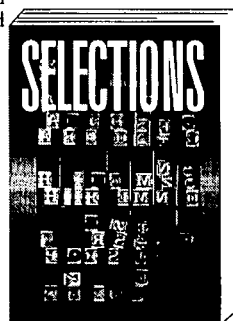
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